

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

SIXTH SERIES

SELECTED BY

J W MARRIOTT

EDITOR OF "GREAT MODERN BRITISH PLAYS"
"THE BEST ONE ACT PLAYS OF 1937" ETC.
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FOREWORD

THE first series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*, which appeared in 1924, was the first of its kind to be published in this country, and although the need for such a book was suggested by the Board of Education's new attitude towards the teaching of English the success of the volume surpassed the most sanguine anticipations. Four more volumes followed quickly, but although during the last ten years other editors and publishers have produced rival collections, the demand is by no means satisfied. There must be at the present time several dozen volumes of one-act plays intended for school use, as well as a number designed for a more sophisticated public. And there are more to come.

The publication of these collections (mislabeled 'anthologies') of short modern plays has been justified by results. Obviously it has supplied a definite need, but—possibly less obviously—it has done much to stimulate, or even to create, the need which it immediately supplies. "Appetite comes with eating," as the French say, and at no time in our history has there been so much reading of plays as at the present day. The ability to enjoy a printed play is an acquired taste. "Once the idiom of play-writing is grasped," declares Mr Sladen-Smith, "there is no more fascinating pursuit than play-reading. It may become almost a vice. Other types of reading, the novel especially, seem flat and tedious in comparison."

The recent revival of amateur drama has done much

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to restore the one-act play to favour, and the teams competing in the annual tournaments arranged by the British Drama League and the Scottish Community Drama Association are always on the look-out for the right material—not so much the play which is easy to act as the play which has sound dramatic qualities. Hundreds of new one-act plays are being written every year, and an editor's function is to discover the most meritorious.

There is also a growing recognition of the value of drama in the school, and the study of the modern play is now regarded as the natural starting-point in teaching what has come to be termed 'dramatic appreciation'. During the last few years speech-training has grown more important, and the teacher is no longer content with the recitation of poems and the reading aloud of extracts of standard prose. The production of a play is so much more 'vital,' and the psychological effect of acting is from an educational point of view invaluable.

For the youngest children it is necessary to discover plays in which the dialogue keeps within the range of a limited vocabulary and which deal with comparatively simple emotions and ideas, but for older pupils, including the adolescent, there is no need for specially written plays—merely for specially chosen plays. The plays intended for schools must be the best, and nothing less than the best is good enough. A professional cast can make a second-rate play appear impressive, but the team of young amateurs must practise on a play so efficiently made that it is capable of surviving the worst that may happen to it.

The segregation of the sexes in many schools creates a difficulty there are few satisfactory plays for boys or girls only. A girl will satisfactorily undertake a male rôle in a fantasy or a costume play, and a boy can take

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a girl's part in a Shakespearian scene (as the Elizabethans knew), but in a modern play dealing with contemporary life such changes are less desirable

Something might be said about plays written for a cast of women only. There is a demand for plays of this kind, but although the supply is continually increasing, the general standard is still maddeningly low. It is no compliment to women, nor is it true, to assert, as so many of these plays do, that women's interests are trivial. There exist two notable full-length plays for all-women casts, *Nine till Six* and *Children in Uniform*, and in neither is the absence of a man sensibly felt. One of the points—perhaps *the* point—of a play with an all-feminine cast is that a man would be intrusive. Man's absence from a girls' school is obviously right, his absence from a milliner's shop is satisfactorily contrived. One might add also *The Rebellion of Youth*, an amusing example of how to tell a dramatic cautionary tale. By virtue of its many good acting parts and its sound doctrine *The Rebellion of Youth* stands high among unpretentious plays for all-women casts.

It is less difficult plausibly to exclude men from a one-act than from a full-length play, yet one is too often conscious that the men have been deliberately eliminated from a cast which should naturally have included them. I venture to suggest that the following three-play bill fulfils the first essential of integrity without men, and possesses the variety of a well-composed programme—historical drama, modern industrial tragedy, and modern well-dressed comedy. The plays suggested are “Women at War,” by Edward Percy (in the present volume), “The Great Dark,” by Dan Totheroh (*The Best One-Act Plays of 1933*), “Smoke-screens,” by Harold Brighouse (*The Best One-Act Plays of 1931*).

The plays in the sixth series have been chosen for their dramatic merit, and though none of them has been

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specially 'written down' for youthful actors they are all suitable for intensive study or for school production. Some of them are quite new. Others, which are a few years old, have been included because they have been missed by other editors and are clearly too good to be neglected.

J. W. M.

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The authors for “The Dye-hard” and “The Great Globe Itself”; the author and Messrs J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., for “Mr Sampson”, the author and Messrs G. P. Putnam’s Sons, Ltd., for “The Workhouse Ward”, the author’s representative (Mrs Browning) for “Augustus in Search of a Father”, the authors and Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., for “Women at War,” “The Centurion’s Billet at Swacking Bulphen,” “The Londonderry Air,” “The Poison Party,” and “The Dumb Wife of Cheapside.”

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WOMEN AT WAR

A PLAY FOR SEVEN WOMEN

By EDWARD PERCY

CHARACTERS

LADY (ALTHEA) SHOALES
NAN SHOALES
MISTRESS NEVE
MISTRESS BAREBEGOD
DAME URSULA CLIBBUTT
MISTRESS DROOD
PHILADELPHIA WITCHETT

The scene is the oak-beamed parlour of my Lady Shoales' house in the village of Appledore, in Kent, on the 17th of June, 1645

EDWARD PERCY is the pen-name of Mr Edward Percy Smith, M P for Ashford, Kent. He has written, or collaborated in writing, a great many plays, the best known of which are "If Four Walls Told," "The Misdoings of Charley Peace," "Mandragola" (adapted from Machiavelli), "The Shop at Sly Corner," and (with Reginald Denham) "Ladies in Retirement."

Some playwrights are primarily interested in the construction of a good plot, and regard the characters as subordinate to the action, but it is obvious that Mr Percy creates the characters first, and allows the theme to evolve from them. The dialogue is always psychologically and artistically 'right', the women are all clearly differentiated, and form a character-design which is satisfying. The play moves with fluent ease, and apparent ease of achievement is an indication of mastery, but whether that mastery is due to hard work or sheer inspiration one can never guess.

The title "Women at War" may give the impression that the play is either an anti-war document or another study of feminine hostilities. It is neither of these. It is a seventeenth-century picture which, like "Richard of Bordeaux" and a number of other historical plays, has significance in the twentieth century.

WOMEN AT WAR¹

PHILADELPHIA Here's a bundle of old sheets from
Mistress Drood They're in holes—most of 'em But
they'll do. I dare say And I hope to God the holier
parts goes to the King ~~serve and pur pose~~ ^{change}

PHILADELPHIA Oh, I know in *this* house one has to bottle oneself up till one be like a toad blowed out with air. But I must e'en vent a little now and then, for safety's sake.

NAN Well, don't let my mother hear you That's all

PHILADELPHIA 'Tis fair contrary in my lady to be so out of it all Why can't she take sides like the good Englishwoman she is? Fight it out and shame the

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W C 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

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Devil, say I ! And if there be bloody noses and bloody poll—well, it adds a bit o' zest to life, anyway. I ben't afeared of fisticuffs—not I !—and culverins and mortars and mines be on'y fisticuffs on a grand scale I'd as lief my man wore a breastplate as a jerkin—for all that they're awkward fashions to court in, as my poor ribs knows !

NAN There's no sense in this civil war. If 'twas the French or the Spaniards 'twould be a horse of another colour—but to fight your own countrymen, your own neighbours, your friends—brother against brother it is in some parts—for the sake of a silly proud king or an upstart farmer like Master Cromwell—why, it's crazy !

— PHILADELPHIA. *General* Cromwell, if you please, miss — NAN. Master is all he'll get from me, Philadelphia. Master Cromwell and Master Charles ! We'll bring 'em both down to earth. For three years we've seen trade die, honest work wither, and the only flourishing industry in the country the making of widows and orphans ! Can you wonder that wise ^{wise} people like my mother won't be in either camp ? lady-sh.

PHILADELPHIA [*a little abashed*] Oh, I know it's my lady's goodness of heart persuades her to it. But it's very un-English in her to be out of a fight.

NAN Pray God the whole business finish soon ! They say the King's men are due to meet the Parliament's army in Northamptonshire any day now. as near as we can

PHILADELPHIA Ay, and there's some Appledore lads there—on both sides too I'll lay they lam each other Why, there's Philip Neve, for one, in the King's forces—more fool he !—and Hallelujah Barebegod from the heath that carries a pike for Oliver. I'll warrant Mistress Neve and Joan Barebegod will be at each other's throats this afternoon—like *her* son and *her* husband up north. I think *your* mother takes a great risk asking 'em to meet.

WOMEN AT WAR

NAN My mother's one idea is to get all folk together in kindly, peaceable work that's for the good of both sides Is it her fault the men have all gone mad?

PHILADELPHIA Mad, quotha!

NAN. Yes, downright mad What's all this pother about tonnage, poundage, ship-money, and the like, the rights of Parliament and the people or the rights of kings? [Then, after a moment, wistfully] What is it to a quiet life among the sheep and the streams and the giant skies, to the light on the marshes in the morning or the light on the hills in the evening? Nothing but a great noise and roaring.

PHILADELPHIA But for them as *don't* like a quiet life there's a lot to be said for it. Troops passing, and cannons and horses to and fro, and stout lads marching—ay, and one's heart marching alongside 'em, bless 'em! And then the news! I'm all a-tiptoe when the posts come in.

[LADY SHOALES enters *She is a dignified woman, masterful in a quiet way, but with a strong sense of humour as well as sympathy. She is richly but not gaily dressed. She carries several pieces of peeled wood cut into short lengths.*

LADY SHOALES Martin has cut me these staves They're the very thing the regimental surgeons are wanting to mend broken bones I think they should be padded and stitched over with linen—so—though they say that's not necessary Oh, these apothecaries!

NAN [holding up the torn sheets] Look at these sheets Mistress Drood has sent up! *who are to come off*

LADY SHOALES I think I'd speak of them reverently, Nan, as one does of the dead Still, they'll come in, I dare say Joan Barebegod has given me three nearly new napkins

NAN *She is coming, then?*

LADY SHOALES Oh, she's coming She said that as

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I'd asked her in God's name she'd come for His sake, if not for mine

PHILADELPHIA. Did she—the Devil take her!

LADY SHOALES Philadelphia!

PHILADELPHIA Does she think she's the only person on speaking terms with the Almighty? I'm inclined to the Parliament boys myself, but I can't stomach such cant nonsense!

NAN. Does she know Mistress Neve will be here again?

LADY SHOALES [smiling]. She knows very well.

NAN [coming and kissing LADY SHOALES]. I think my mother's a miracle of tact. I don't know how you contrived it. They're sworn enemies since the last sewing. ~~sewings - we went here because of poor Joan~~

LADY SHOALES I'm a baronet's widow, don't forget, Nan. When you are you'll find plenty of unlikely people ready to come to your house. As to they're being sworn enemies, that's all the more reason why they should meet occasionally—poor souls! Besides, Joan knows that if she doesn't come Mistress Neve and her party will be getting ahead with the King's bandages, and the Parliament will be nowhere in Appledore! [A knock is heard] Who's that?

NAN [peering from the window] Old Dame Clibbutt, Mother.

LADY SHOALES Quick, Philadelphia! And let us have out the malmsey and the comfits! And you may bring in your own sewing, if you like.

PHILADELPHIA [with a rapid curtsey] Thank you, my ady. [She goes.]

NAN. Now we shall hear of all the doings in the marshes in the old Queen's day, and how she once danced with Sir Walter Raleigh!

LADY SHOALES Yes, she's outstayed the Golden Age—like a December pippin ^

WOMEN AT WAR

PHILADELPHIA [reappearing] Mistress Clibbutt—if it
please your ladyship *very few*

DAME CLIBBUTT enters. She is an old woman,
nearly eighty, but almost gaudily dressed and
exceedingly sprightly for her years. She carries
a black crook-handled stick and a fur muff. Her
costume is more James I than Charles I. PHILA-
DELPHIA withdraws ~~after - unless~~

LADY SHOALES [taking her hands] Well, my dear lady,
and how do you keep?

THE DAME Badly, my dear, like a poor old woman
I'm a handful of dry bones held together by my
stomacher

NAN [drawing up a chair] Come and sit you down,
Dame Ursula ~~some lady~~

THE DAME Still at your good works, I see [She sits]
I tell you frankly I haven't come to sew. No, no, I'm
much too blind I've come to talk To talk and to
laugh—if there's a laugh left in England to-day.

LADY SHOALES [significantly] If! *in a ^{confused} way*
THE DAME The country's going helter-skelter to the
dogs Things are very different to what they were in
the dear Queen's time The plain truth is, England
does better when there's a petticoat on the throne

LADY SHOALES I wonder if that's true *right*

THE DAME Ay, it is, for a good king must be a
coward at heart, and women are clever cowards, whereas
men are brave as lions and haven't a scruple of brain
between a dozen of 'em Look at these King and
Parliament affairs! We've had four years of it, Turn-
ing the country topsy-turvy for a parcel of whimsy
notions! The King's a fool and slippery as an eel—as
any grandson of Mary Darnley's must be!—and t'others
are crop-eared knaves Queen Bess'd have knocked
their heads together Av. or else have knocked 'em
clean off

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[PHILADELPHIA enters with a tray on which is a decanter of wine, some glasses, and dishes of comfits.]

NAN. Heads may fall yet, Dame, before the business is over.

THE DAME Well, a head sans brain is no great loss, child.

PHILADELPHIA [flaring] No, not if it be a king's!

THE DAME [dryly] Nor a goose's belike, child.

LADY SHOALES. Philadelphia!

PHILADELPHIA [with one of her quick bobs]. Your pardon, my lady.

[She goes NAN is sitting on a stool at the DAME's feet LADY SHOALES is behind the table cutting out bandages]

LADY SHOALES The pity is some of them didn't fall before the business was begun.

THE DAME. Better an old head on the block than a young body lying in a field [With a laugh] If this goes on I'm like to lose the last of my lovers! And as for Nan—why, my dear, it may mean eternal spinsterhood! A very ugly combination of words, as your Devonshire parson knows—he whose song you gave us last week—about plucking roses

NAN [looking up with a smile] Master Robert Herrick?

THE DAME That's the man Though I fancy his eye's a touch too rogush for his cloth I hope he'll publish his verses one day. How does it go?

NAN [singing]

“ Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying. —
And this same flower that smiles to-day,
To-morrow will be dying ”

[PHILADELPHIA enters with a large wickerwork basket.]

PHILADELPHIA Here's the Parliament basket, my lady
And Mistress Neve's coming up the path

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LADY SHOALES Put it down by Mistress Barebegod's chair, Philadelphia. [She does so and withdraws

NAN " Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry ^{be happy}
For having lost but once your prime, ^{you'll}
You may for ever tarry" ^{never}

THE DAME " For ever tarry . ." A pretty song for women to sing with all the men at war. I remember Sir Walter Raleigh saying to me when we danced together at New Romney after the Brotherhood and Guestling¹— Oh, in 'eighty-five it must have been, I was a chit of a girl then ^{as a young girl then}

PHILADELPHIA [reappearing] Mistress Neve—if it please your ladyship

MISTRESS NEVE enters, a thin, stately woman, simply

but royally dressed, an obvious King's woman

PHILADELPHIA goes LADY SHOALES rises and kisses MISTRESS NEVE NAN rises and curtseys

LADY SHOALES Welcome, Kate Neve

MISTRESS NEVE Thanks, Althea. I find welcomes rarer to-day than they were a year ago—before the King's luck 'gan to wane' To-day all I get is a bellyful of black looks Even my own men frown at me, as if I'd the evil eye ^{unwell—unlucky}

LADY SHOALES Do they? At you? " Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

MISTRESS NEVE Oh, every dog has his day to-day Last night, as we sat at supper, a great stone came flying through the open lattice on to the table

LADY SHOALES A stone?

THE DAME [interestedly] Stone-throwing, eh?

MISTRESS NEVE It smashed the blue bowl of Venice glass that my brother gave me Lucy was cut on the lip by a splinter The poor child bled for an hour

¹ A very ancient ceremony still held in the Cinque Ports

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THE DAME Od's bodikins! Did ye have the rogues whipped and stocked, eh?

MISTRESS NEVE 'Twas too dark to see who threw it Roger ran out, but he found no one. That's what we may all expect if these horrible Iron-sides have the best of it.

THE DAME. I thought the marshes inclined to the King, though the Parliament's fleet holds the Channel, and they *do* say that if his Majesty wants to receive a *very* particular message from abroad it has to go through the smugglers at Rye in a barrel of brandy!

MISTRESS NEVE [*bitterly*]. There's a loyalty that lasts just so long as the weather's fine When the east wind blows . . . Did you hear the Vicar of Stone in Appledore Church on Sunday? Oh, Master Marten's a trimmer! He means to be safe in either event. A year ago he was King's man to the backbone.

[PHILADELPHIA enters with the second basket]

PHILADELPHIA If it please your ladyship—the King's basket.

LADY SHOALES. Set it by Mistress Neve, Philadelphia, and thank you. [PHILADELPHIA obeys and goes]

MISTRESS NEVE Which do we make to-day, Althea—bandages or slings?

LADY SHOALES Whichever you please

MISTRESS NEVE I think bandages are the more generally useful I shall go on with them. [Her eye catches sight of the first basket.] Does that mean the Roundhead woman will be here again?

LADY SHOALES It does

MISTRESS NEVE. Really, Althea, I think you carry your impartiality too far. *Knick*

LADY SHOALES. But, Kate, aren't the Parliament's men men too? Can't they suffer? We women-folk must do our sewing, as it were, under a flag of truce. I don't ask you to make for them. And those of us, like myself,

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who profess nothing, will divide what we make between you Can you ask fairer of me than that? Let's get away for half an hour from both King and Parliament—and study what we have in common King

MISTRESS NEVE [with indignation] What have I in common with Joan Barebegod? ~~purple~~

LADY SHOALES [quietly] Humanity ~~characted~~

[There is a short pause while they continue sewing]

LADY SHOALES Have you good news of Philip?

MISTRESS NEVE I had a letter come yesterday There was a post through from Leicester I have it with me, and I'll read it to you when I've worked a spell. ~~work'd~~

LADY SHOALES Is he well?

MISTRESS NEVE He is Our last batch of linen reached them safely He sends the surgeon's thanks, and says they cry out for more It is those things they most need —linen and drugs The townsfolk and villagers are very good in the places they pass through, but everywhere linen is scarce Some housewives have given all their bedding Others have hidden theirs with their plate

NAN I think I'd rather sleep between sacking than have sick men at my door without the wherewithal to ease them ~~fix'd~~

THE DAME Specially if they was gallant young captains with kiss-curls!

PHILADELPHIA [entering] If it please your ladyship—
Mistress Barebegod's come ~~char~~

[JOAN BAREBEGOD enters She is a fine-looking woman of about thirty, very plainly and severely dressed Her manner is prim and formal, but she is hearty enough beneath it

JOAN I fear I'm late, but, as God would have it, the bees swarmed —

[NAN and LADY SHOALES rise to greet her The others remain seated MISTRESS NEVE averts her face

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LADY SHOALES. Oh, the afternoon's young yet,
hope you took them. ~~placed~~

JOAN. We did. The Lord sent us a mighty swarm
Eli was sharply stung about the head. He does not take
tribulation in the right spirit. Is it bandages to-day,
friend?

LADY SHOALES. As you like. Mistress Neve is making
bandages. And here is a pair of splints to begin your
basket. And a pair for you too, Kate.

MISTRESS NEVE. Thank you, Althea

JOAN. The Parliament thanks thee, friend [Glancing at
MISTRESS NEVE] I have a prompting within me to make
slings.

PHILADELPHIA. Will it be meet for me to fetch my
needle and my little bit o' sewing now, my lady?

LADY SHOALES. Why, yes, child. Mistress Drood is
not come, but we shall hear her if she does.

PHILADELPHIA [bobbing]. Thank you, my lady.

LADY SHOALES. Have you heard from your husband
lately, Mistress Barebegod? [She goes.]

JOAN. Not these three weeks. ~~few~~ ^{ever} a ~~chance~~ ^{chance} Hallelujah is a poor
correspondent; but when he does write there's a ring
to his letters like the Psalms of David.

THE DAME. Now, if I married again I should choose a
husband who could write like the Song of Solomon.

LADY SHOALES [laughing]. Dame!

THE DAME. "Behold, thou art fair, my love, behold,
thou art fair. . . ." No one will ever say that to me
now. But fifty years ago it wouldn't have been an over-
statement.

JOAN. Methinks it ill becomes an old woman—a *very*
old woman—to speak lightly of Holy Writ. Besides,
we know that Solomon, when he wrote that, had no
woman in his mind at all.

THE DAME. If you mean to tell me that a man with

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three hundred wives could ever be *without* a woman in his mind—

[The rest of the sentence is drowned in general laughter]
JOAN BAREBEGOD looks shocked and displeased

MISTRESS NEVE Since Mistress Barebegod is so jealous of her Bible there's a text I'd commend to her. "Touch not the Lord's anointed."

JOAN Be it far from me, friend, to bandy words with thee But thou knowest it is also written: "The letter killeth, the spirit maketh alive." ~~you should never leave~~
THE DAME And, as Will Shakespeare has it, "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose", so we get no further that way

[PHILADELPHIA enters. She carries her own small workbag and a little pile of bandages, which she takes to JOAN. Then she picks up some linen and sits sewing.]

PHILADELPHIA I've made these out of my last year's petticoat and in my own time, Mistress Barebegod, and I would have them go to the Parliament

MISTRESS NEVE Well!

JOAN, Thank thee, friend ~~but always~~

MISTRESS NEVE It seems to me, Althea, that the impartiality of this houseerrs in favour of General Cromwell

LADY SHOALES I've no control over the maid's opinions, Kate It was of myself and Nan that I spoke If Philadelphia wishes her own contribution to go to the Parliament, to the Parliament it must go

JOAN [putting them into her basket] 'Twill gain me what I lost through my bees being so hasty

MISTRESS NEVE I think 'twould be wiser if green girls kept their opinions to themselves, or else followed those of their betters

LADY SHOALES Why, Kate, all Appledore knows that Philadelphia is only for the Parliament because young Nick Boorman is groom to General Fairfax!

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THE DAME [*chuckling*]. Is that so? Ha, the wench blushes!

PHILADELPHIA [*hotly*]. Well, what better reason can any girl have for taking part in a quarrel than being on the side of the man she's—fond of?

MISTRESS NEVE [*moved*] God knows that's true enough!

JOAN [*severely*] Methinks she has espoused a great cause for a very light inducement. ~~such~~ ^{such} ~~small~~ ^{small}

THE DAME. As women ever will ~~will~~ . . . ^{will}

LADY SHOALES I sometimes wonder whether any cause is so great as the mighty hearts that champion it.

MISTRESS NEVE [*vehemently*] The King's is!

JOAN [*contemptuously*] The King's! [Working herself up as she speaks] A tyrant who has sold his people again and again to the Scots, and brought over Irish soldiery to butcher our men, who denies us the right of speech or of rule or of freedom to worship God as we think best! Nay, friend, the King's cause is a little cause. But the cause of the people is a great valiancy, a battering against ~~such~~ ^{such} ~~small~~ ^{small} injustice and oppression, priestcraft and kingcraft—

MISTRESS NEVE [*quietly*]. And a throwing of stones at helpless women whose men are at the wars.

THE DAME Ah, if Queen Bess had married and gotten a son we should have been spared these chip-chop times.

NAN [*to MISTRESS NEVE*] Didn't you say, mistress, that you had a letter from Philip? Mayn't we hear it?

MISTRESS NEVE. I've no heart, Nan, to read my lad's letter to an unfriendly company

LADY SHOALES. Kate!

JOAN Now, the Lord be with thee, neighbour! When all's said and done I'm a woman—and a mother too, though my imp can but tug at my skirts. Read thy letter in peace and in God's name. I'll sit mum, I promise thee.

MISTRESS NEVE [*icily*] I'm sure I'm obliged to Mistress Barebegod. ^{such} _{such} [She takes out the letter and unfolds it.

WOMEN AT WAR

THE DAME A letter from a lad at the wars ! How my heart used to flutter over 'em in the old days !

MISTRESS NEVE [reading] " My darling little mother—if, madam, I be not lacking in respect so to call you " lacking in respect !—" we are quartered in fair comfort here, and I am to thank you and the Appledore ladies on behalf of our chirurgeon for the linens and dressings you have sent. They are much needed by those of our troop that have wounds, yet are not laid by In truth, we cannot have too many, for of all these things there is a great and increasing scarcity " [Looking round the room] And that is thanks to all who sew for the King's basket

LADY SHOALES I think we may take it as a soldier's thanks to those who sew for either the King or the Parliament

MISTRESS NEVE " We have much riding to and fro and foraging, and I doubt not but one day soon we shall meet with the enemy and sting him soundly " Pray God you do, my son ! *exchanging*

JOAN Nay, that's very provocative

MISTRESS NEVE " He "—that is, the enemy—" is in Northampton now, Cromwell and Ireton in command—good men, both, but suet" *deliberately*

JOAN [indignantly] Suet *deliberately*

THE DAME It fits 'em ! By the Lord Harry, it fits 'em !

JOAN Suet, forsooth ! *really*

MISTRESS NEVE " I would you could see our Prince Rupert He is as I would have every general be—bold, dashing, and yet wary, with a light in his eyes too that it does your heart good to behold I would the King left more to him, for he has gifts that would have won us this campaign thrice over ere now, but the King muffs all " *figur*

JOAN Ay, that's very true The King muffs all

MISTRESS NEVE. I would ask you to hold your tongue,

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Mistress Barebegod, in accordance with your promise
"They do not grow roses in Leicestershire that will vie
with ours in Kent, but the lasses are fully as pretty,
and freer, I think, with their kisses."

THE DAME. And I'll warrant his judgment is the outcome of experience!

MISTRESS NEVE "The corn promises well, particularly the wheat and the barley, if we do not spoil too much. These men we are fighting are fine fellows, and methinks there is little at bottom divides us"

LADY SHOALES And that's the truth!

JOAN [shaking her head] No, he's wrong there.

MISTRESS NEVE I too think he's wrong Philip's overyoung to understand politics "They fight like men possessed They have, I feel, an inward faith that matches our outward allegiance very prettily There are some Appledore lads amongst them. One, Jack Squire, that was taken a few days since tells me Hal Barebegod is in Cromwell's army—him that sang so shockingly through his nose and had the pretty wife"

LADY SHOALES
NAN
THE DAME } [laughing]. Oh!

JOAN [confused and pleased] God bless the boy for calling me pretty! Though 'tis vanity in him and in me But Hal does not sing through his nose

MISTRESS NEVE "It is quiet here and hot, but the stillness and the heat are not those of the marshes, and I am sick for the long lights and the long shadows I would give a guinea to hear the redshank call, but that it might break my heart Oh, Mother, I am weary of war! At best it is a bad business Command me to my sisters and to Roger Teach him to be a King's man, but teach him too to be England's man They may not always mean the same. From your ever-devoted

WOMEN AT WAR

son and servant, Philip Neve If Jess pups keep me a dog-whelp "

[There is a long silence after the reading of the letter, the women are too moved to comment At last JOAN speaks.]

JOAN. Thy son writes well, neighbour

LADY SHOALES *[rising and pouring out the wine]* I pray you have him home with you by the harvest

MISTRESS NEVE Philip will not come home till the business is fixed

JOAN Nor my Hal neither

THE DAME 'Twill take some fixing—this business betwixt suet and a muff!

LADY SHOALES *[as NAN and PHILADELPHIA hand round glasses of wine and the comfits]* Kate, will you not drinck a glass of malmsey wine? After so much reading your throat should be dry

MISTRESS NEVE I will, Althea, thank you *[She raises her glass]* God for King Charles!

JOAN *[raising hers]* God for the Parliament!

LADY SHOALES *[quickly stopping the rivalry]* God for us all! *[There is a long pause after they have drunk]*

THE DAME *[mumbling a comfit]* You long promised me the secret of these French ratafias, my dear, but my Jill is still agog for it

LADY SHOALES I crave your pardon, Dame! I've had it in my mind a hundred times since you asked me The secret's very simple Let her make them as she makes your macaroons, but, instead of using only sweet almonds, they must be mixed half sweet and half bitter And be sure, when she pounds them with the white of egg, that she don't let them oil That's all there is to it. Will you tell Jill how vexed I am for my forgetting it?

THE DAME Half sweet and half bitter, and let them not oil? I shall remember.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MISTRESS NEVE. Now you've sown your recipe broadcast, Althea, for I've been taking a note of it, you may depend!

JOAN I too, though I'm no lover of the French and their ungodly cookery. Still, if I rebaptize them it may be I'll purge them of their vanity. They'll be "Kent comfits" on *my* table.

THE DAME So long as you make 'em toothsome I shan't scold you if you call them "Cromwell's Kisses"

[There is a laugh at this, in which JOAN joins. They are forgetting their political differences]

LADY SHOALES Mistress Barebegod has a prescription for coriander biscuits that would set your mouth a-water if she told it. Come, neighbour, fair's fair, I've given you a notion. Do you give us one?

THE DAME Coriander biscuits? They will be for the colic, surely?

JOAN Oh, they're a grand remedy for the colic, for the hiccough, and, indeed, for all diversities of the wind, though they eat as a sweetmeat. Thou takest four eggs, but the whites of two only, four spoonfuls of orange flower water, two of rose water and spring water, together with a pound of fair sugar. Beat them together for an hour by the clock, and then mix in a pound of flour well dried and an ounce of coriander-seeds. The whole thou must bake in a temperate oven till conveniently short.

MISTRESS NEVE *[interested]* I' faith, that's the very prescription I had from my Aunt Bates of Yalding, but that she is for the addition of cinnamon, or of ginger if the cinnamon be not favoured. And, indeed, we do make it with ginger ourselves.

JOAN The ginger may be well enough, I dare say. But methinks it complicates the flavours unduly. And good cookery, like good religion, should strive after simplicity.

WOMEN AT WAR

MISTRESS NEVE Nay, there I'm with you ! There's no more passionate Puritan in a kitchen than I

LADY SHOALES. And you have a recipe from the great Sir Kenelm Digby himself, I think, Kate

MISTRESS NEVE *[laughing]* Yes, I have his directions for a plum cake It cries for sixteen eggs, three pounds of butter, a pint of good ale, half a pint of sack, and a pint of cream, and I know not what beside !

JOAN Lord ! A very kingly cake ! As Royalist as the great chemist himself ! He's in France, so they say

[MISTRESS DROOD enters excitedly.]

LADY SHOALES Mistress Drood ! You're late. The King's basket has missed you

MISTRESS DROOD *[out of breath]* I could not stay to be admitted Have you heard the news ?

SEVERAL News ? What news ?

MISTRESS DROOD Why, there has been a pitched battle between King and Parliament in Northamptonshire The King has triumphed !

MISTRESS NEVE God be praised !

MISTRESS DROOD There are three thousand rebels slain, and twice as many taken Generals Cromwell and Ireton are being brought to London in chains.

JOAN. I'll not believe it ! Who brought the news ?

MISTRESS DROOD Dick Quailes It's just come through to Tenterden

JOAN Oh, I know these Tenterden rumours !

LADY SHOALES What else ?

MISTRESS DROOD That was all Drood could get from him. Dick's at every ale-house on the road, and now's too happy to talk

MISTRESS NEVE Oh, if we could but know 'twas true !

JOAN *[significantly]* Ay—or false

LADY SHOALES *[shaking her head]*. Somehow it doesn't ring a-tight.

JOAN Cromwell and Ireton taken ! When in every

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

line of Master Neve's letter there's the King beat written as large as life !

MISTRESS NEVE [*indignantly*] That there's not, madam !

JOAN I'll not believe it God cannot have deserted us so shamefully ! [*Realizing what she has said, in confusion*] That is—I should say—so unaccountably. I'll take no news from a drunken finker. Why, Dick Quailes in his cups would deny his own mother !

MISTRESS NEVE You may well say that. You would have sung a different tune if he'd brought news of a Parliament victory. I grant you Quailes is a drunken lout, but Fate chooses strange mouthpieces at times ! This is what we've prayed for through the quiet nights [*Fervently*] I thank Thee, O God, for Thy great and overwhelming mercy !

[*There is a pause*

LADY SHOALES Right or wrong, there'll still be need of our work. There's no defeat without wounds, no victory without wounds . . .

[*There is a long silence as the women return to their sewing. Then NAN begins to sing very, very softly.*

“Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying :
And this same flower that smiles to-day——”

[*There is the quick drumming of galloping hoofs, growing nearer and nearer The women start and listen intently.*

PHILADELPHIA [*running to the window*]. A post ! A post !

LADY SHOALES [*also at the window*]. The Parliament post !

[*The hoofs stop. All except MISTRESS NEVE and JOAN crowd round the window.*

MISTRESS DROOD He's stopping !

NAN. Dismounting !

WOMEN AT WAR

[PHILADELPHIA runs from the room, followed by NAN LADY SHOALES Nan, Nan! [She follows eagerly MISTRESS DROOD He has a bulletin in his hand! See, he's nailing it to the inn door!] [She hurries out

THE DAME A Royalist would have nailed it to the church.

[She too goes slowly, leaning on her stick MISTRESS NEVE and JOAN are left alone MISTRESS NEVE goes on quietly working JOAN, you can see, is itching to follow the others

JOAN. Art thou not going too, neighbour?

MISTRESS NEVE [proudly] My son's troop has need of these.

[JOAN glances at her for a moment, and then returns, with equal dignity, to her own sewing There is a long pause, then PHILADELPHIA enters excitedly

PHILADELPHIA A Parliament victory! A Parliament victory!

[She crosses the room and hurries out by the other door. Murmurs and shouts from without can be heard The two women try hard to appear composed MISTRESS DROOD enters

MISTRESS DROOD The Parliament have beat the King at Naseby! Three days since! He's fled towards Scotland! It's a rout—a rout! There's five lads from Appledore killed ~~five~~ ^{in the} ~~in the~~ ^{in the}

JOAN [rising, almost beside herself] Who? Who? MISTRESS DROOD John Humblehaft of Ridge Farm, Peter Wickham, young Philip Neve by a bullet through his heart— [Realizing what, in her excitement, she has let fall] Oh, Mistress Neve, what have I said? ~~utterly~~ ^{utterly}

MISTRESS NEVE stiffens in her chair, white and stricken

JOAN [impetuously she is agonized] And my man? My man? Is there news of Hal?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MISTRESS DROOD looks at her, tries to speak, but she cannot, then covers her face with her hands and rushes from the room. JOAN sinks into her chair, and, stretching out her arms on the table before her, leans her head upon them and, after a moment, bursts into a storm of weeping. For a few seconds MISTRESS NEVE does not move. Then she reaches out her left hand and gropes along the table for JOAN's fingers.

CURTAIN

THE DYE-HARD

A COMEDY

By HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

CHARACTERS

TOM MURGATROYD (36), *a yarn-dyer*

MR CHADWICK (50), *owner of a yarn dye-works*

WALTER FARNWORTH (26), *owner of a rival
dye-works*

SUSAN MURGATROYD (28), *Tom's wife*

ALICE BUTTERWORTH (30), *her friend*

*The scene is the Murgatroyds' sitting-room,
Blackton, Lancashire*

MR HAROLD BRIGHOUSE is a prolific writer of plays, both long and short, and no collection of modern drama can afford to omit an example of his work. The difficulty is to decide which particular example is most characteristic, for Mr Brighouse is extremely versatile, and has mastered many forms. He wrote tragedy in "The Northerners" and farce in "The Odd Man Out," but on the whole he follows the tradition of British drama in choosing comedy—especially the sort of comedy which derives from character—e.g., "Hobson's Choice," "Zack," "Mary's John," and "What's Bred in the Bone." In writing one-act plays he exhibits an even wider range, from an old morality, "The Apple-tree," to the grim drama of "The Price of Coal," including a number of charming fantasies for open-air performance, such as "The Ghosts of Windsor Park," "The Laughing Mind," and "The Prince who was a Piper."

What is the essence of drama? Is it action, suspense, conflict, accelerated movement to a climax? No two critics can be found to agree on a definition, but "The Dye-hard" holds the attention because one wants to know Tom Murgatroyd's ultimate decision. In "The Stoker" the struggle is external and visible, in "The Dye-hard" it takes place within a man's mind, and only a deep insight into his real nature will enable us to anticipate the outcome. Mr Brighouse keeps us guessing, as, in altogether different circumstances, Mr Shaw kept us guessing the final decision of *Candida*.

THE DYE-HARD¹

The Murgatroyds, TOM and SUSAN, have just finished midday meal on a Saturday in summer. They live in a small house with a small front garden on the outskirts of Blackton, Lancashire, and they have a better conceit of themselves than to eat in the kitchen. The sitting-room has plain colour-washed walls, window C, and door up R leading to the lobby. Its furniture dates from the Murgatroyds' marriage, six years ago, and is presentable, if standardized. It includes a sofa. The pots on the table indicate that while SUSAN is on normal diet TOM has eaten slops.

SUSAN is going out shortly, and has already changed from her early morning to her afternoon dress, over which is a brightly printed overall. TOM is fully dressed, except that he has neither slippers nor boots. SUSAN's coat and hat await her convenience on a chair.

TOM [pushing chair back from table] That's fine. It's good building food, is porridge I've heard it called the Scotsman's meat

SUSAN With lots of milk it might be bearable.

TOM I don't agree with you, not about milk. In my opinion milk's a drawback to porridge. It spoils the natural flavour of the oats

SUSAN [with irony] And water's a good drink [Offers cigarette from packet] Having one?

TOM No, thank you

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W C 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

SUSAN Well, I am.

[*Lights and begins to move dishes from table.*

TOM. That's all right I've said it before, Susan, and I say it again. You alter nothing. You eat as usual and go about as usual You haven't got a war on, and I have It's my war, not yours, and there's no cause for you to suffer.

SUSAN You admit you're suffering?

TOM By not smoking? Nay, I'm master of that

SUSAN I'm glad to hear that, Tom I needn't go on with my idea that the sight of me smoking and the smell of tobacco set the craving up in you.

TOM Don't worry.

SUSAN. And it's the same about meat? I don't deny I've felt awkward about me eating meat for dinner and you supping porridge When a man sits at home all day he can't help sniffing the smell of cooking. I've thought many a time you must find even smells trying when the oven wasn't smelling for you

TOM Ach! It's a pleasure.

SUSAN What's a pleasure?

TOM Watching you going about the house doing the things you do every day and I never see you do when I'm at the works I'm coming to the conclusion that household jobs were specially thought out to display the grace of a woman

SUSAN Don't talk so daft.

[*She has collected dishes on to tray, and goes to door.*

TOM [*reaching door in advance and opening it*] Allow me

SUSAN And you know what I'd allow you if I hadn't got both hands to a tray [Exit SUSAN

[*TOM grins, then sees the cigarette packet on table, goes to it, notices that it is nearly full, begins to take out a cigarette, then firmly puts it back. He goes to sofa and lies down SUSAN returns, carrying his boots.*

THE DYE-HARD

SUSAN I've a free hand now [Puts boots on table

TOM I lay down without my book I'll be obliged if you'll pass it across

SUSAN Reading, reading, reading. [Reading the book's title] *The Theory of Aniline Dyeing*. As if you didn't know all there is to know about that

TOM I don't deny I know practical side of it. Only I'm not in practice at the moment.

SUSAN Whose fault is that?

[Brings book, stands over him.]

TOM. Am I mistaken, Susan, or did I hear you say you and Alice Butterworth were going to the pictures this afternoon?

SUSAN We are

TOM Then don't let me detain you.

SUSAN It's early yet You heard me saying something since then You heard me say I'd a free hand now And if you'll cast your eyes on table you'll happen see what's there [TOM looks angry] Nay, Tom, Tom!

TOM It's no good, Susan

SUSAN. I'll go down on my bended knees and put your boots on if you'll let me

TOM No.

SUSAN Tom!

TOM I'm stopping at home

SUSAN Saturday afternoon and all

TOM Makes no difference I keep on telling you I'm at war And if I can't bang that into your head I'll bang this. I'm unemployed, and I know what every unemployed man knows go out walking and you come home hungry.

SUSAN Oh, Tom! As if you were one of them!

TOM Luckier than most, I know that. I've got a home worth stopping in and a sofa worth lying on. I've got resources, but I'm not squandering them I'm ready

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

and willing for a long siege, and it'll not be me that breaks at the end. It'll be young Walter. And you can oblige me, Susan, by putting those boots back where you got them from, or I'll go out with them myself and—

SUSAN. I want you to go out. It's so bad for your health to—

TOM I'll go out and leave them at the pawnshop and walk back in my stocking feet. Is it raining?

SUSAN. No, it isn't, but I never thought it would come to this between you and me. I never thought of you planning to shame me in the eyes of the neighbours.

TOM Are you putting those boots away?

SUSAN Very well, Tom

[She takes them out, and returns at once.]

TOM Right, so long as it's understood I'm in earnest. Now, listen, Susan. I'm not shaming you. Far from it! I've walked out from the works for a principle, but I've got views on principles. It's a belief of mine that a man's principle ought not to hurt his wife, and I'm living a strange life myself, a bit like prison—only you're here, so it isn't like prison—but I've told you to alter nothing in your way of life. I've got money in bank, and long enough before that money's spent I'll have young Walter begging me to go back on my terms. I'm living quiet myself, and eating quiet, and that's insurance. It's the extra safety margin in case young Walter's got more obstinacy than I think he has. But it's my insurance, Susan, and you carry on as usual. As usual, and no one can say I'm letting my principles do damage to my wife.

SUSAN. Well . . . I hope you're not too sure of yourself.

[She takes off her overall.]

TOM Meaning between me and Walter?

SUSAN. Yes.

THE DYE-HARD

TOM That's all right And now—

[Suddenly picks her up as she hangs overall behind door and kisses her]

SUSAN Well!

TOM Just to show you, with a kiss thrown in for a flourish Just to show you I've not gone soft yet with lack of exercise

SUSAN [fondly] You great gawp! [Then she can see out of window, and—] Put me down, Tom!

TOM You're all right where you are

SUSAN Put me down, you fool! There's some one coming up garden path, and you know folks can see in here from garden

[But he carries her from the caller's possible view.]

TOM That's a complaint I have about women They can't concentrate Even when a woman's being kissed she's not single-minded about it There's a bit of her mind wondering if her back hair's straight

[A ring is heard, and he puts her down]

SUSAN [hands to her hair] You've ruffled mine all right

TOM It'll do for going to door and telling a fellow we don't want any writing-pads to-day [Exit SUSAN]

[TOM picks up book and sits to read SUSAN returns, showing in CHADWICK, a well-dressed businessman of fifty]

SUSAN [evidently impressed] Tom, it's Mr Chadwick.

TOM Mr Chadwick? Who's he? [Sees CHADWICK, rises] Oh!

CHADWICK How are you, Mr Murgatroyd?

TOM Fine, thanks [They shake, then TOM with a gesture] Of course! Of course! I couldn't think for moment what brought you in these parts [Informing SUSAN] It's the cricket-match Mr Chadwick's works team and our lot

CHADWICK Aren't you playing yourself?

B*

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

TOM. Sit down. Me playing? No, I'm not playing to-day.

CHADWICK. That's a bit of luck for us. That spin bowling of yours—

TOM. Ach! I'm getting old

CHADWICK. Old?

TOM I'm thirty-six

CHADWICK. Why, man, Jack Hobbs—

TOM I know, I know Only, in the first place, Hobbs is a marvel, and, in second place, he doesn't spend his time in a dye-house when he's not playing cricket. That's one thing I've got on Jack Hobbs I've not lost my amateur status

CHADWICK [offers cigarette-case]. Smoke?

TOM No, thanks She will.

CHADWICK [rises, gallantly] Allow me, Mrs Murgatroyd [As he holds lighter for her] I'm sorry your husband's a bit out of sorts

TOM Who says?

CHADWICK. Off smoking and off cricket.

[Glances at TOM's feet.]

TOM. Boots off, and all That's me to-day Sitting at home doing a bit of reading

CHADWICK [picks up book, looks at title] I see Do you find he can tell you much?

TOM Well, considering he's a man that writes a book, he isn't quite a fool I'll tell you I've pretty near finished that book, and three times—three times, mind you—he's got me proper wondering if he was right or I was And one time out of them three I give him best He beat me

CHADWICK Only once, though

TOM. Oh, well, Mr Chadwick, you don't expect a fellow that writes a book on the theory of dyeing to know the job same as a practical man like me But it just shows you—she's been objecting to my reading—

THE DYE-HARD

it shows you you can pick up summat useful out of a book

CHADWICK That's so Once in a way Well [glancing at SUSAN], the fact is, seeing I was over anyhow with the team—

SUSAN They'll be missing you

CHADWICK What? Oh, they're happy Getting lunch at the Red Lion

SUSAN [rising] You'll be wanting lunch yourself, Mr Chadwick

CHADWICK Is anything the matter?

SUSAN I'm good at guessing

TOM So'm I What about the pictures you were going to?

SUSAN Mrs Butterworth's calling for me.

TOM You didn't mention that before

SUSAN. No

TOM I forget if you're a married man, Mr Chadwick

CHADWICK. Oh, yes

TOM Oh, well [Their eyes meet in sympathy] Well, can you tell me how to budge a woman who doesn't want to budge? I've got no dynamite

CHADWICK [smiling] It's perfectly true I did come to discuss a bit of business with you

SUSAN And that's no news

TOM Pipe down, Susan! Give the man a chance Now, Mr Chadwick, I'm listening It may go in at one ear and out at t'other, but I'm listening

CHADWICK Not very encouraging

TOM Go on. It's your move [CHADWICK hesitates] Oh, I'll cut it short for you I reckon the whole county knows I've had trouble with Walter Farnworth A man like me walks out, and it's news All right Now you go on from there

SUSAN I don't like Staithley Bridge

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

TOM Susan, Mr Chadwick's works are at Staithley Bridge, and if I decide to go to his works you'll like Staithley Bridge Not that he's asked me yet.

CHADWICK. Mrs Murgatroyd, would double his present wages do anything to overcoming your objections to Staithley Bridge?

TOM I'm not denying this, Mr Chadwick—that's a compliment

CHADWICK No It's an offer.

TOM. That's ten pounds a week you're offering. Did you know that?

CHADWICK I knew.

TOM Ten pounds a week, and they say there's a slump on

CHADWICK It's men like you that beat the slump

TOM That's true That's something our Walter's missed seeing He'll see it if I go—permanent. I'll be a loss to Walter

SUSAN That's vicious, Tom.

TOM I've not gone yet.

CHADWICK Oh, but—

TOM I'm considering your offer, Mr Chadwick It has a lot of points in its favour It has ten pound-notes a week in its favour But wait a bit I've not seen inside your works

CHADWICK [smiling] Are you going to talk about machinery?

TOM [quietly] Machines! Machines! Machines are like men [glancing at SUSAN] and women they're all right till they get uppish But there's one trade, Mr Chadwick, where the fewer machines the better dyeing yarn I'm a yarn-dyer, and a good 'un—and machines —pah! Get a vat and put the right stuff in it, and hang your yarn over dye-poles, same as they did in ancient Egypt That's how good yarn-dyeing's done to-day, same as it was then, and if you've let the machinists tell

THE DYE-HARD

you different, and if you've listened to a machinist's salesman telling you the tale, and if you've put in labour-saving machinery that doesn't save because it doesn't do good work, then I tell you——

CHADWICK Yes, I did put machinery in

TOM Then to hell with you !

CHADWICK I put it in, then scrapped it.

TOM Oh ! You put it in, then scrapped it ? Then, am I right ? Is there anything to beat the old way with yarn . . . with a few modern improvements and . . . and a man like me to watch the mixings and the temperatures ?

CHADWICK I'm sure you're right.

TOM I could tell our Walter something now

CHADWICK [sharply] Could you ?

TOM I could so I could tell him something about the machines he's aiming to put in I could tell him they bit you

CHADWICK Quite possibly different machines.

TOM Same—alleged object

CHADWICK Don't you see, Murgatroyd, you can't tell him ?

TOM Why ?

CHADWICK You can't give him information you've got in private conversation with me It would be breach of confidence

TOM I don't recollect you cautioned me about it

SUSAN He'd no need to, Tom, and you know it. That's quite understood, Mr Chadwick You've been speaking confidential

CHADWICK Thank you, Mrs Murgatroyd

TOM That's right That's quite right, but it's an awkward hole to be in When Walter told me he meant to order those machines I first reasoned with him, and when reason fell on barren ground I put my coat on and walked out. And now I've proof positive from your

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

experience that I'm right about it, and I've got to hold my tongue and maybe watch Walter spending money buying costly plant that I know and you know isn't worth the metal it's made of Suits you fine, Mr Chadwick Suits you to have nobody stop him making a fool of himself, same as you made a fool of yourself. But I quite see your point. I agree with it. My tongue's tied.

CHADWICK. Isn't this the point that you're not any longer one of Farnworth's men, and that therefore—

TOM Aye, I'm at large. I admit that I don't need to feel I'm Walter's watch-dog

CHADWICK Especially as I . . . I made an offer

TOM You did, Mr Chadwick, and it's got me worried.

CHADWICK Worried?

TOM. Not about the figure That's satisfactory. No! I'm worried about myself

SUSAN Not about me?

TOM. I can't think why I don't say "Yes" I can't think what's stopping me.

[SUSAN puts her hand on his shoulder
No, lass, it's not you Oh, I know, you're thinking of the chapel you're used to, and the shops you're used to, and yon fellow in the Co-op groceries you'd have married if you hadn't married me, and you go in there and smile, and he gives you the best cut of bacon, you keeping your mouth shut about me being the bacon-fancier in this house, and not you—when I'm eating normal, that is Yes, there's advantages in staying put. also there's something called progress, and ten pounds a week for [looks at CHADWICK] a starting wage is raising you and me into the motor-car class

SUSAN I hadn't thought of that

TOM Second-hand to start with, but you never know where folk will finish once they've gotten their feet loose from their native clay.

THE DYE-HARD

SUSAN We'll come, Mr Chadwick

[About to shake hands with CHADWICK

TOM [catching her wrist] Who's making this decision, you or me?

CHADWICK It's obviously "yes."

TOM I know it's obviously "yes" [Then, with exaggerated gesture] Then, why can't I say "Yes"? Why can't I? I'd have called me better than most at knowing my own mind, and I want to say "Yes," and I can't. What's holding me back, Susan? What is it?

[SUSAN runs out, and before the men have time to speak is back with TOM's boots.

SUSAN [eagerly] Put them on

TOM What's the idea?

SUSAN You can't think hard like that.

[Indicates his feet.

TOM I take you A man's got to feel he's on parade to make a big decision [Sits with boots, then] But if I put these on I'm declaring the siege is raised.

SUSAN It is raised

TOM [rises, moves from boots] I can see now I was hasty to throw that motor-car into the argument I may sound backward to you, Mr Chadwick, sound as though I'd less enterprise than a woman It isn't that, only I'm studying deeper [Bell rings

SUSAN [annoyed] Oh! That'll be Mrs Butterworth

TOM She's one you'll miss if you go away from here

SUSAN Not me I'll learn to drive that car, and it's not more than an hour's run from Staithley Bridge to Blackton [To door

TOM [catching her at door] Think on, Susan You're going out with her

SUSAN Nay, I'm not Not now

TOM You're going out You cloud my judgment I see you in a new hat and better clothes than I can buy now, and—

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

SUSAN. Tom!

TOM No! No! It plays the hangment with my reasoning. You're going out, I tell you.

SUSAN. Well, if you've no objections I'll let Mrs Butterworth in while I'm putting my hat on. My old hat!

[*Exit* SUSAN.]

CHADWICK. I don't know why you're hesitating, Murgatroyd.

TOM Nor me, really. I'm sorry, Mr Chadwick. I'll be nearer my answer when I'm shut of my wife. A woman's a handicap to a man with a problem

CHADWICK. Why is it a problem?

[*SUSAN returns with MRS BUTTERWORTH.*

SUSAN [*as they come*] I won't be a minute. I've got my things down here. Oh, this is Mr Chadwick. Mrs Butterworth. Sit down, Alice

[*CHADWICK bows ALICE sits SUSAN puts on outdoor clothes*

TOM. How do?

ALICE. I'm well, thank you. Did you say Chadwick?

CHADWICK That's my name

ALICE I know some Chadwicks. Are you related to Jeremiah Chadwick of Rochdale?

CHADWICK I don't think so

SUSAN. Alice, he's—

ALICE Oh, you needn't be superior about Jeremiah Chadwick! He's a well-known man in Rochdale. An undertaker. Yes, they say in the family he was baptized to be an undertaker. Lamentations, you know. Has it ever struck you, Mr Murgatroyd, how common Bible names are in Lancashire? You've a Bible name yourself, but I think it's only in New Testament Thomas Doubting Thomas, as they called him

TOM. Doubting! Doubting!

[*CHADWICK turns to hide smile*

THE DYE-HARD

Then I've a misfit name. I look before I leap. That isn't doubting It's deciding. [Turns his back, goes up to window, and looks out; draws back at once] Susan, I'll thank you to open door to Mr Walter. And take Mrs Butterworth with you.

SUSAN Mr Walter!

TOM [to CHADWICK] Coming up path

CHADWICK [suspiciously] What does he want here?

TOM He'll tell us that

[Bell rings SUSAN gestures ALICE to come to door

ALICE [rising] Well, I'm pleased to have met you, Mr Chadwick You've got important namesakes in Rochdale. [Holds out her hand

CHADWICK [shakes it with slight reluctance] Good day, Mrs Butterworth

SUSAN [impatiently] Come along, Alice.

ALICE I'm coming

[Exeunt ALICE and SUSAN, door left open.

CHADWICK [briskly] Now, listen here, Murgatroyd. You've to think quickly for once, and—

TOM [checking him] He might listen, and all. That door's open

SUSAN [off] Yes, he's in, Mr Farnworth You'll find him in there

[She comes to door WALTER enters Exit SUSAN, closing the door. WALTER is twenty-eight, and in cricket flannels and blazer.

WALTER [taken by surprise on seeing CHADWICK] Hullo! You here!

TOM Of you two gentlemen it's more remarkable that you're here I recollect we didn't part so friendly

WALTER [glances at TOM, then goes to CHADWICK] How are you?

CHADWICK [shakes hands] I'm all right [Looks at watch] Is it so late? [It isn't] You've got your war-paint on early

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

WALTER. I may have a bit of travelling to do before the match [*Looks at Tom.*] But I hope not

TOM. Referring to me?

WALTER Possibly you've not heard of our troubles

TOM. So what they are, they're your troubles, Mr Walter

WALTER [*tersely*] I see I thought it might still interest you to know why Mr Chadwick's team is almost certain to win, but as it doesn't—— [*To door*

TOM Hold on. Let's get this straight Are you here about cricket?

WALTER. Yes

TOM Oh! No, no, it doesn't interest me.

[WALTER *opens door, and Tom goes to him.* Why's Mr Chadwick's lot going to win? We beat them on their own ground

WALTER [*closing door*] We had a good fast bowler and [*indicates Tom*] a good slow bowler.

TOM You've still got a good fast bowler Got Aleck Warburton, haven't you?

WALTER No He's playing for Blackton to-day in the League match

TOM [*disgustedly*] I call the man a traitor. League or no league, he's no right to desert us to-day. It's always a needle match when we meet Chadwick's, and Aleck knows that as well as I do Oh, but——

[*Looks blank, remembering the match is no affair of his.*

WALTER [*quickly*] That isn't all Wilfred Turner sprained his ankle practising last night I'm playing young Blakeley for him

TOM He'd be a good bowler if he were ever on the wicket I'm bound to agree with you, Mr Walter. It's fair giving Chadwick's the match

WALTER Unless you'll play, Tom

TOM Me?

CHADWICK. Weren't you saying you're too old?

THE DYE-HARD

TOM I passed the remark I wasn't too old last June to take five wickets of your lot for thirty-two

CHADWICK Of course, strictly, you're not eligible to play for Farnworth's to-day

WALTER That might be—

TOM No That's right. [Sits, miserably] That's right Play for a team for ten years, and when they're in a hole you aren't allowed to assist them It's things like that make life what it is

CHADWICK [touches his shoulder] Oh, I'm not making a point of it

TOM You're not? [Rises and shakes hands] Thank you, Mr Chadwick That's the right note I call that sporting, not objecting to a strong opponent though you've grounds for it. It puts you high up in my estimation I wish I could take the opportunity.

WALTER. But you can Mr Chadwick says—

TOM He says like a gentleman Only it isn't what he says, it's what I feel You'd better be getting after some one else, Mr Walter. How can I do it, Mr Chadwick? [Almost appealing] How can I? It'd be a sign that I belonged to Farnworth's It'd look like I'd forgiven him.

[CHADWICK again has a smile to hide

WALTER Forgiven?

TOM Aye Me playing cricket under a skipper that's no better sense than to think machines can dye yarn They can't dye yarn They don't save labour, and I'm against labour-saving if they did And if I join your team to-day it's as good as saying I've been converted to your views, when the whole town knows I've been standing out against your views

[Casually, WALTER takes an end of green yarn out of his pocket.

What's that?

WALTER Have a look at it.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

TOM [*takes a look*] What's wrong with it? [Looks at WALTER] If you tell me that's been dyed by machinery I'll have to take back every word I've said

WALTER There's no new machinery in the place yet, Tom. It's only a fortnight since I first mentioned it to you.

TOM [*holding the yarn up*]. Well?

WALTER You dyed it

TOM. Oh, I dyed it? I seen it were good work.

WALTER Yes. Now look at this [From his other pocket produces another end of green yarn, which is perceptibly duller than the first] That's the best we can do against it. That's the best of four tries.

TOM Green's a tricky shade [Examines it] Who've you got trying his hand at filling my shoes?

WALTER Young Blakeley

TOM I thought so I've taught him a lot But not quite everything Well, I'll tell you one thing, Mr Walter. You can't deliver a shade like that It'd ruin the reputation of the firm

WALTER What am I to do?

CHADWICK Er—— [Comes and touches TOM's shoulder [TOM pockets the yarn with the instinct of not letting a rival see

TOM. Oh, aye Yes, of course

[Glances self-consciously from CHADWICK to WALTER.

CHADWICK. You're not forgetting me

TOM I'm too grateful to forget

WALTER Grateful for what he said about the team.

TOM There's more to it than that

WALTER I thought there would be when I found Mr Chadwick here [Meets CHADWICK's eye

CHADWICK Well, you could think right without overheating your brains And not a case of trying to steal your man, Farnworth. He isn't your man

TOM That's right enough I'm disengaged at

THE DYE-HARD

moment [Takes the yarn out] Aye, and look at result. [Reports yarn]

CHADWICK [not looking] The result is, I made you an offer Your wife approved, I think.

TOM My wife? Aye, that was a failure of mine, failing to get shut of my wife during a business talk And then me letting slip summat about a motor-car to a woman with ambitions She'd take a lot of pleasure driving into Blackton in the early morning, her sitting in the car and watching the other women doing their front steps

CHADWICK There's nothing to stop her

TOM She'd take some stopping now You saw yourself how that idea of a car turned her right round from hating Staithley Bridge to loving it I'm just short of having said absolute 'yes' to him, Mr Walter, but that's how we stand

WALTER I see Well, strong men before you have been ruled by their wives

TOM What? Me ruled by her!

WALTER I'd just like you to know one little thing, Tom I'm not putting that machinery in

TOM [deeply impressed, then quietly]. That's a victory for common sense

WALTER It's a victory for you You pulled me up, and I made further inquiries I found it didn't do all that was claimed for it

[CHADWICK shows annoyance.

TOM There's this about our Walter, Mr Chadwick—he's not above learning

WALTER [dryly] Much obliged.

TOM Well, so you ought to be obliged Look at brass I've saved you! Aye, and look at the problem you've set me

CHADWICK The problem being—the problem!—whether Tom Murgatroyd wants to get on in life or to

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

stay back with the comparatively small dye-works of Mr Farnworth.

TOM. I know that, Mr Chadwick, I know. But look at the mess they've made of things since I went. And if I go permanent and Mr Walter gets another dyer in my place it isn't likely he'll be as good as me. You know it isn't, or you'd not be after me yourself.

CHADWICK. That's his trouble.

TOM. I can't see it that road.

CHADWICK. When a man makes a move his past is something he puts behind him.

TOM. Then I'm none moving. I couldn't live happy with the weight on my mind that Farnworth's were turning out bad work. I'm sorry, Mr Chadwick. I'm deeply obliged to you for your offer [*turns to WALTER*], but if you'll re-engage me now, this moment, Mr Walter, I'll put my flannels on and play for Farnworth's with my conscience clear.

WALTER. Right.

[SUSAN *bursts in.*

SUSAN. It is not right.

TOM. I sent you to pictures.

SUSAN. Don't be daft! I've had my ear at keyhole.

TOM. Then I've a job for you. Go and get iron and put the straightest crease you can in my white trousers. When I go on field to-day I'll be observed above a bit on account of my late quarrel with Mr Walter, and I'll make a smart appearance. [*Hustling her*] Go on, now. There's no time to waste.

[*Pushes her out, closes door, and stands against it.*

CHADWICK. A little forcible.

TOM. I did the needful. She'd overheard Mr Walter say I'm ruled by a woman.

CHADWICK [*accepting defeat*] Well. [To WALTER] You going straight to the ground? My car's outside.

WALTER. Thanks. [Looks at TOM] Yes, my team's complete. [TOM opens door. *Exeunt CHADWICK and WALTER.*

THE DYE-HARD

TOM [comes C, sees boots]. Boots, eh? Cricket boots, I reckon [Calls] Have you finished, Susan?

[Takes coat off

SUSAN [off] Give me a chance

[TOM swings his bowling arm]

TOM [doubtfully] Well, it'll be a test of oatmeal diet

[SUSAN enters with his trousers over her arm

Done them?

SUSAN Not yet [Gently, hand on his arm] Tom!

TOM It's settled right way, lass You'd never be happy if you knew I were miserable

SUSAN Why should you be?

TOM [takes yarn out of his pocket] That's the answer. Cast your eyes on that You heard outside door, but you didn't see I've been too long at Farnworth's to be heedless about them I can't let work like that go out of the place

SUSAN [comprehendingly] All right [She just touches him

TOM [takes waistcoat off] I'll slip upstairs and change my shirt. Think on those trousers are done by I come down.

[Up to door.]

SUSAN You didn't—

[She stops

TOM [by door] Eh?

SUSAN You didn't say anything to Mr Walter about a motor-car wage

TOM I didn't just then, but you wait a bit, Susan I've learnt things about my value to-day that I didn't know before

[Going out]

SUSAN You're always surprising me, Tom

CURTAIN

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

By HAROLD CHAPIN

CHARACTERS

A NIGHT WATCHMAN, *a solid, gruff-voiced old man of seventy. Wears corduroys, a heavy great-coat, and a large old bowler hat. His beard and eyebrows are shaggy, but his upper lip is more or less clean-shaven. He speaks slowly and with dense authority.*

AUGUSTUS, *a young man of twenty-seven. Typical Bowery 'sport'. Dressed in striped jersey, light trousers, very tight-fitting, a light jacket and waist-coat, pointed-toed brown boots much the worse for wear, and a narrow-brimmed black bowler hat. He needs a shave, and, though spry, looks very down on his luck.*

A POLICEMAN, *of the usual type, but suffers from a bump of facetiousness and a desire to be funny*

TIME AND PLACE *The corner of a London square early on a winter's morning*

HAROLD CHAPIN was born at Brooklyn in 1886, but as he was brought to England at the age of two his American citizenship was merely technical. In thought and temperament he was characteristically English, and his best plays, like "It's the Poor that 'elps the Poor" and "The Dumb and the Blind" (included in the second and third volumes of this series), are almost perfect specimens of low-life Cockney drama ~~This is a common low-type~~.

Chapin was essentially a man of the theatre. His experience as an actor and subsequently as a producer doubtless helped him in his work as dramatist. In his short life he wrote sixteen plays, including "The New Morality" and "Art and Opportunity," but his genius expressed itself most naturally in the one-act form. He had an enviable gift for writing dialogue—the power to make words 'come alive' as they escaped from his pen, and he had an even rarer gift in his power to create character.

Chapin was doing excellent work for the theatre when the War broke out. He enlisted immediately, and was killed at the battle of Loos in 1915.

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER¹

The NIGHT WATCHMAN is discovered sitting forward in his shanty, smoking a short pipe. As curtain rises the POLICEMAN paces slowly across back from R. to L., and then down pavement L. He pauses and looks at shanty, then comes to trestle down L. and leans on it and hails the NIGHT WATCHMAN facetiously

POLICEMAN Hullo, you're not dead, then?

WATCHMAN [looking up] Good Gawd, no! 'Oo's been saying I was? *is speak*

POLICEMAN No one I—

WATCHMAN Do I look ill? I feels all right.

POLICEMAN It was just my—

WATCHMAN P'raps I was over-sound off.

POLICEMAN It was only my fun

WATCHMAN [wondering] What was?

POLICEMAN Oh, about you're being dead

WATCHMAN But I ain't

POLICEMAN No [Bitterly] I know you ain't I never thought you was You can't see the joke. I was trying to be funny, see?

WATCHMAN Funny? I don't see much fun in that.

POLICEMAN [retreating] Oh, good night

WATCHMAN Blimme, what's up with you? Stop and ave a warm

¹ Published separately by Messrs Gowans and Gray, Ltd. Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W C 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

POLICEMAN. Thanks ; don't mind if I do.

WATCHMAN. Then why don't you ?

POLICEMAN I give it up

[Enters enclosure by stepping over low end of pole.]

He leans against shanty, which sways.

WATCHMAN 'Ere steady on ! Do you want to 'ave me over ?

POLICEMAN *[with a return of facetiousness]* Not to-night, thank you.

WATCHMAN *[quite seriously]*. I shan't be here to-morrow.

POLICEMAN *[after warming hands for a moment in silence]*. Cold.

WATCHMAN Who ?

POLICEMAN *[nonplussed]* We—the weather . . .

WATCHMAN. You speak for yourself I ain't

POLICEMAN *[humorously once more]* Not a crime to feel the cold, is it ? *[Pauses for a reply]* I say I shan't be dismissed the Force for mentioning it, shall I ? *[Pauses again, still no reply from the WATCHMAN]* Oh, Lor ! *[Changing the subject]* Rather an uncomfortable sort of place to spend the night, this

WATCHMAN. I've seen worse.

POLICEMAN *[engagingly]* I'm sure

WATCHMAN 'Ow about 'Ampstead, right facing the 'Eath ? Or the middle of Waterloo Bridge, with it raining cats and dogs

[The POLICEMAN starts to make a humorous remark, but thinks better of it. The WATCHMAN regards him severely]

WATCHMAN What say ?

POLICEMAN I was only going to say, " Yes, yes "

WATCHMAN Oh ! *[Resuming]* Well, 'ow about them places, eh ? Or the top o' the Highgate Harchway ? Or 'Obing Viaduck, where the road-cleaners drench you down every morning reg'ler Or . . . well, or some

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

place like that? Why, this is a nice sheltered locality 'longside them

POLICEMAN [convinced] Yes, I can see it must be.

WATCHMAN Then what did you want to talk such nonsense for?

POLICEMAN You know you're very hard to get on with, you are, really 'Ere I try to be agreeable and chatty in return for a warm, and you snaps me up I'm 'urt You can't 'elp 'aving no sense of 'umour, poor chap, but when a *guest* at your fireside tries to be pleasant and agreeable you've no business to go snappin' of 'im up like this [WATCHMAN laughs gruffly]

POLICEMAN Oh, you see the joke of *that*, do you? Perverted old individual! [WATCHMAN snores softly]

POLICEMAN Eh?

[Snore repeated]

POLICEMAN 'Ere, I say, you're a nice sort of watchman, I don't think I'll make a note of that "Watchman on drainage job asleep" ~~watching~~

WATCHMAN [quite calmly, without opening his eyes] I shall reply that the policeman on duty mesmerized me with 'is funny little way ~~hypnot~~

POLICEMAN [hastily stepping over low pole R] Well, think I'll be saying good night.

WATCHMAN Good night

POLICEMAN [by exit down R] Good night, old Stick-in-the-mud ~~the person who spoils the fun~~

WATCHMAN [coming out of his shelter angrily] Look 'ere! Don't you go calling me out of me name!

[POLICEMAN exits down R] Tryin' to be funny 'E ought to be on the 'alls I wonder they 'ave 'im in the Force

[Enter AUGUSTUS up R. He is whistling dolefully, but walking fairly briskly to keep warm, hands deep in pockets. He comes down C, and stops as he reaches the front of the shelter. The

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

WATCHMAN *is just re-entering the shanty, and has his back full to AUGUSTUS.*

AUGUSTUS Gee whiz! You look cozy! Can I have a warm up?

WATCHMAN [glancing over his shoulder as he pats up sacking on seat inside shelter] Why shouldn't you?

AUGUSTUS And yet, again, why should I? [He steps over pole and stands R of fire, warming his hands. The WATCHMAN is well out of his sight] Cold, ain't it?

WATCHMAN I feel all right

AUGUSTUS Well, that's a blessing, anyway. I don't My, what a fire! I haven't felt warm for a month The dive where I have been dossing is like a refrigerator.

WATCHMAN Where's that?

AUGUSTUS Over Edgware Road way—Bell Street, to be exact

WATCHMAN Why aren't you there now?

AUGUSTUS Tariff too high for me. [Shows pockets] Stoney, boss, stoney my pocket is empty

WATCHMAN Drink or gambling?

AUGUSTUS How rude you are! Nothing of the sort. Depression in trade the trade is not flourishing

WATCHMAN Trade is bad. What do you expect with this Government? D'you smoke?

AUGUSTUS [nodding] And chew nail

WATCHMAN Chewin's immoral and ungodly It's a disgusting vice, that's what it is Have a smoke?

[Proffers pouch.]

AUGUSTUS Eh? Rather! You're a trump!

[Takes pouch and rolls himself a cigarette, taking papers from jacket pocket]

WATCHMAN [eying cigarette-papers unfavourably] Why don't you smoke a pipe, like a Christian?

AUGUSTUS Haven't got a pipe [Lighting up] Don't like pipes, anyway Cigs are more sporty You're as bad as my old dad was. Where's the difference?

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AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

WATCHMAN [*laying down the law decidedly*] Cigs is vice.
yes isn't.

AUGUSTUS Oh, rats! ~~in the ear~~ ^{and my} [Hands back pouch
WATCHMAN [*taking pouch and observing AUGUSTUS's hand*
be does so] Blimme, 'ow your 'and shakes! What's
'with you?

AUGUSTUS Guess I'm suffering from a bad attack of
ante denarii, sometimes known as gotno spondulico,
which is invariably attended with nante monjary and
onsequent shakes

WATCHMAN [*greatly impressed*] Where do you feel it?

AUGUSTUS Sinking, 'ollow feeling inside, and a nasty
light headache

WATCHMAN Do you mean to say you're 'ungry?

AUGUSTUS I had some breakfast yesterday

WATCHMAN Why didn't you say so afore? [Bends
down and produces from under seat a paper containing bread
and meat, which he passes to AUGUSTUS] D'ye want a knife?

[Offers a clasp knife

AUGUSTUS 'Pon my Sam, you're a white man! [Opens
knife and starts eating] Bit tricky, eh? [alluding to the
difficulties of eating with a clasp knife]

WATCHMAN Ah, it takes some time to get used to it.
[Watches AUGUSTUS eating in silence for a moment] Let me
know if the knife shuts up on your tongue, won't you?

AUGUSTUS [*in surprise*] Eh?

WATCHMAN It used to 'ave a nasty 'abit of shuttin'
up like I tightened the screw a bit the other day One
sometimes makes things a bit better by tinkering them
about, and sometimes a lot worse

AUGUSTUS It works all serene now

WATCHMAN I 'aven't 'ad the opportunity of tryin' it
—not liking to run any risks of cuttin' meself, you understand
I'm getting a bit old to try experiments Now,
a young chap such as you 'asn't no cause to bother about
a cut lip—they 'eals up all right nine times out o' ten,

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

whereas in anyone o' my age a pois'nous wound is a narsty matter.

AUGUSTUS. Very.

[Continues eating.]

WATCHMAN *[after another pause]*. I suppose you know it's a bad thing to eat so fast—especially when you're 'ungry. You'll be gettin' 'eart-burn.

AUGUSTUS I'll risk it. Upon my Sam, you are a brick, though! If I was the sentimental sort I'd say you was the first—the only one—to treat me decent since I've been back.

WATCHMAN. Back? Where from?

AUGUSTUS States.

WATCHMAN Meanin' America?

AUGUSTUS *[with mouth full]* Um.

WATCHMAN. What part?

[AUGUSTUS appears not to hear.]

WATCHMAN. What part of America?

AUGUSTUS Top left-hand corner

WATCHMAN *[severely]*. Don't be funny! I asked you what part of America you was in

AUGUSTUS *[hurrying through the information]* New York mostly—out West, and in 'Frisco a bit, but N'York mostly

WATCHMAN. What sort of place is it?

AUGUSTUS. At Tip-top. Best ever

WATCHMAN 'Ere, no irreverence What trade was you in?

AUGUSTUS Trade! Now, do I look like a trades-person? I was a pro-fessional.

WATCHMAN Well, what perfession, then?

AUGUSTUS I'll give you three guesses

WATCHMAN. I asked you, I ain't a guesser.

AUGUSTUS Persistency, thy name is—

WATCHMAN. I asked a civil question, I expecks a—

AUGUSTUS A civil answer I've heard that before. I'll try. *[With exaggerated courtesy]* I was assistant deputy

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

stamp-licker at the White House. Y'see, there's so much danger of the Tammany bosses poisoning Teddy that they have to find galoots with fine constitutions like me . to

WATCHMAN [severely] You ain't telling the truth!

AUGUSTUS Discovered! Did you expect me to!

WATCHMAN [stolidly]. I did.

AUGUSTUS Well, you are a lalapaloosa! You deserve it for your faith I respect an elderly yob There's something touching about one I was a sport, see! [WATCHMAN does not see] You know Did a bit with the gloves [Spars at imaginary antagonist WATCHMAN remains absolutely dense.] Bunco-steerer Never hear of a bunco-steerer? A—a—oh, Lor', a 'sport.' You know what a 'sport' is, don't you?

WATCHMAN Fishin'? ^{simpler fellow} sportman

AUGUSTUS Fishing? Crimy, no! A 'sport'! Oh, poker, poker You know—

[Deals imaginary pack of cards

WATCHMAN Card-sharper?

AUGUSTUS. Only when necessary, but you're getting warmer Sort of guide, philosopher, and friend to anyone who wanted to see life and spend money. I milled a bit too when I could find a backer

WATCHMAN [after a pause] I've got a son out there— doing well not your sort at all . . . thank Gawd! Why don't you get work?

AUGUSTUS Well, y'see, it's like this I'm not the working sort I'm a 'sport' I am. Over in God's country I could always make good, but over here . when I tried to arrange a match in the back-room of a little pub—just a few friendly rounds you understand—the boss said the police would do for his licence Rot! As if he couldn't have squared 'em! Then I started a poker-dive—tip-top, I can tell you—but no one came but the cops, and they didn't lose any money You're

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

no 'sports' here. The only swabs willing to lose money seem to be the foreign waiters, and you have to be a foreigner to get them Talk about free trade!

WATCHMAN. Bettin's sinful. You're on the road to the pit. You are going to hell

AUGUSTUS. Pit be blowed! I haven't enough for the gallery.

WATCHMAN. You are laughing on the brink of 'ell flame what can't never be quenched, for his mercy endureth for ever [Very impressively] Amen. Give us this day our daily bread

AUGUSTUS. Glad to hear you've done I wonder you talk to me if I'm such a 'gnostic—let alone give me grub.

WATCHMAN. Talking can't 'urt me I've 'ad worse nor you around my fire afore to-night

AUGUSTUS Have you now? [Returning knife.]

WATCHMAN You 'eard of the Willesden Wehr-wolf? Well, 'e was took sittin' as it might be there. That was while I was working in the 'Arrow Road It was a dark, 'ailstormy night, wi' a wind as went through you. 'E comes to my fire just as day was comin' on, and 'e says, "Can I 'ave a warm?" and I says, "W'y not?" 'E was soaking wet, and 'e fair steamed aside my fire. Steamed like a kettle 'e did, until a cop comes up, thinking I was on fire, and then they nabbed 'im 'Orrible, savage-lookin' man 'e was! You could fancy 'im drinkin' 'ot blood 'Ave a drop?

AUGUSTUS [starts] What? [Sees that the WATCHMAN is proffering can] Oh, not for a bit, thanks

WATCHMAN It was through me as the Tootin' murderers got 'ung Ever 'eard o' them?

AUGUSTUS [sarcastically] Old pals of mine

WATCHMAN And that young chap as shot 'issel in a 'ansom Lord de Vees—

AUGUSTUS. Poor old De Vees! We was at Oxford together.

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

WATCHMAN Well, 'e 'ad a warm at my fire, and give me 'alf a quid just before 'e done it. I've got it now.

AUGUSTUS What, ain't you spent it?

WATCHMAN Spend a half-quid as was given me by a lord as committed suicide! Don't be silly! I've got it in the glass case with my old father's watch and some shells and things—

AUGUSTUS Shells and things?

WATCHMAN Lord, yes! I like relics o' the great You see, you ain't nothin' to what I've 'ad around my fire—not yet

AUGUSTUS [thoughtfully] Thanks Sounds hopeful for the future I don't mind 'aving a drink now [Takes can and drinks a mouthful—he spits it out again with a wry face] Here, what is it?

WATCHMAN What is it? Why, tea!

AUGUSTUS Stale tea, and cold too, on a night like this! You ought to be ashamed of yourself It might have seriously upset me I haven't tasted tea since—[pauses suddenly] since Gawd knows when

WATCHMAN More used to beer, I suppose

AUGUSTUS Wrong, boss! Whisky is my mark. Rye for pref

WATCHMAN Strong drink is sinful

AUGUSTUS "Strong drink is sinful" "Bettin's sinful" Was there anything else you said? Yes, b'gosh "Cigs is vice!"

WATCHMAN So they is

AUGUSTUS Granted, boss, granted I haven't tasted tea not since— And I hope I never may again. Leastways, not cold

WATCHMAN What did you come over 'ere for?

AUGUSTUS Eh? Oh, one thing and another

WATCHMAN Nothin' in particular?

AUGUSTUS No. Yes [Seriously and in a different tone] To hunt up my father and mother

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

WATCHMAN 'Ave you found 'em?

AUGUSTUS. I don't know

WATCHMAN Don't know?

AUGUSTUS. No. I think I have . but I'm not sure And I'm not sure whether 'e'll be pleased to see me

WATCHMAN. Oh! 'Ad a tiff? You know where 'e is, then?

AUGUSTUS Um-hum. I know where I can find him But I'm not sure whether 'e'll be pleased when I go to him.

WATCHMAN. Course he will 'E's one o' your sort, I suppose.

AUGUSTUS. Why?

WATCHMAN Like father like son That's gospel

AUGUSTUS [whimsically] Is it?

[Changes his position restlessly]

WATCHMAN Ain't you tired leanin' about? Fetch yourself that barrer.

AUGUSTUS Thanks

[Steps over fire and places barrow to L of hut, and sits in such a way that he is out of sight of the WATCHMAN, but well in the glow of the firelight.]

WATCHMAN You're never warm enough there. Move around to the fire

AUGUSTUS I'm all right, thanks

[A pause AUGUSTUS starts to speak]

WATCHMAN What say?

AUGUSTUS I was thinking about your boy that you said went out to the States? I wonder if by any chance I might have met him. What was his name?

WATCHMAN Oh, you wouldn't never 'ave met 'im 'E was honest

AUGUSTUS. That's good Still, you might tell me his name

WATCHMAN Augustus Herbert Alfred Moon.

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

AUGUSTUS [nods quietly to himself] No, I never met him

WATCHMAN. Of course not! Went out nine years ago—'e was eighteen then Started as a plumber and gasfitter Doing well by now

AUGUSTUS Oh?

WATCHMAN What might you mean by "Oh?"

AUGUSTUS How do you know he's doing well?

WATCHMAN Sure to be

AUGUSTUS You haven't heard from him?

WATCHMAN Not yet

AUGUSTUS Not yet? Nine years!

WATCHMAN But then 'e was busy and 'ad 'is way o make Shouldn't be surprised if he owned a big business by now

AUGUSTUS Let's hope so But suppose he doesn't? Suppose he hasn't got on?

WATCHMAN Can't suppose such a thing 'E was honest

AUGUSTUS That does make a difference—in plumbing

WATCHMAN It makes all the difference 'E was Band of 'Ope from a boy 'e never knew the taste of strong drink, 'e never touched a card Why, 'e was simpl' bound to get on.

AUGUSTUS People don't always

he never

WATCHMAN. 'E 'as

an "

AUGUSTUS How about— [Checks himself confusedly]

WATCHMAN Eh? How about what?

AUGUSTUS Was there a a— [Sees a wa to ask the question] I mean, did anyone hear from him?

WATCHMAN Yes once

AUGUSTUS Who?

WATCHMAN [gruffly] Never you mind

AUGUSTUS Was it some one you didn't like?

WATCHMAN [with some heat] 'E wrote to some girl 'e'd

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

been walkin' out with: he wrote to her as soon as 'e got ashore. Silly, affectionate letter sayin' as 'e was 'omesick.

AUGUSTUS P'raps he was.

WATCHMAN [*indignantly*] 'Omesick, with 'is way to make! She said as 'e was engaged to 'er too. Nonsense! I told 'er as 'e'd forgot all about her

AUGUSTUS Um-hum I suppose she's forgot all about him too long before this

WATCHMAN Not she She still talks about 'im, I'm told

AUGUSTUS What! Ain't she married?

WATCHMAN Girls don't marry so easy in England, my lad Especially when they chuck away good chances, as she's done

AUGUSTUS [*very earnestly*] I say, I want to ask you something Just for the sake of an argument, suppose your boy hasn't got on? Suppose he were to come back, hard up . . . down on his luck altered from when you knew him? Suppose he'd even been in prison?

WATCHMAN [*angrily*] Are you talking about my Haugustus?

AUGUSTUS Only for the sake of argument

[POLICEMAN *enters above square L and crosses behind shanty, coming down slowly R of enclosure during dialogue*

WATCHMAN Well, don't I tells you 'e was bound to get on

AUGUSTUS 'E might have been unlucky.

WATCHMAN There's no such thing as luck

AUGUSTUS Oh, isn't there? How about an accident?

WATCHMAN 'E'd 'ave written 'Is not writing proves—

AUGUSTUS But if he hadn't?

POLICEMAN [*who has been listening*] Excuse me, my lad,

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

but if you're trying to make old Stick-in-the-mud see a joke I shall have to call the ambulance for one of you

WATCHMAN 'Ullo, Comic Cuts Tryin' to be funny again?

POLICEMAN Oh, we are gettin' on! He knows I was tryin' to be funny

WATCHMAN This young man wasn't.

AUGUSTUS No, but I was trying to make him see an argument. I ought to have known it was no good

POLICEMAN Why? Do you know old Stick-in-the-mud?

AUGUSTUS No How should I?

POLICEMAN Why shouldn't you? He ain't likely to lead you astray

WATCHMAN Funny again

POLICEMAN Appreciated at last

AUGUSTUS [rising] Well, good night, boss, and thank you

WATCHMAN Sit still You ain't in no 'urry.

AUGUSTUS No, but—

POLICEMAN If you want to go off as soon as I comes up I shall have to keep an eye on you as a suspicious character

AUGUSTUS What do you live on? Pins?

POLICEMAN No Why?

AUGUSTUS You're so sharp

POLICEMAN [laughing] That's good Now, I can always laugh at a joke at me own expense

AUGUSTUS I suppose you'll go and crack that to the cook

POLICEMAN [surprised] Cook? What cook?

AUGUSTUS It's a joke, Mr Officer Cook, policeman

WATCHMAN Bless you, 'e ain't the cook sort! 'E's married

POLICEMAN How do you know?

WATCHMAN You look it Anxious, hard-worked,

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

get-the-breakfast look about you ! Better-lookin' p'lice over in America, eh, me lad ?

POLICEMAN [*to AUGUSTUS*]. Oh, so you're from America ? What part ?

AUGUSTUS. North-west Territory

WATCHMAN. Why, you told me New York.

AUGUSTUS I was out West most of the time

POLICEMAN. Then why tell 'im New York ?

AUGUSTUS. You're mighty sharp, aren't you ? Because we'd been mentioning New York, and I said I'd been there If you're so sharp you'll cut yourself.

POLICEMAN. Or somebody else, p'raps What business might you have been in out there ?

AUGUSTUS. I might have been President, but I wasn't

POLICEMAN What was you, then ?

AUGUSTUS. Steward on board train *C&K*

WATCHMAN [*stolidly surprised*]. Why, you told me something about—

AUGUSTUS [*fiercely under his breath to WATCHMAN*]. Shut up, can't you ?

WATCHMAN [*in a loud and very hoarse whisper*]. Oh, that's it, is it ? Right Once tip me the wink and I can be as silent as the grave . . . as silent—

[*Goes on whispering unintelligibly but loudly, and winking to AUGUSTUS*

POLICEMAN [*startled*] 'Ullo ! What's up with old Stick-in-the-mud ? Sounds as if 'e'd swallowed a phonograph

WATCHMAN [*turning on the POLICEMAN and assuming a bullying tone*] Never you mind what's the matter with me You're too inquisitive, see ? You want to know too much, you do, see ? See ? [To AUGUSTUS *in a knowing whisper*] That's 'ow I talks to 'im

POLICEMAN [*amazed*] Now what's up ? You are a rum 'un, rounding on a chap like that I was only

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

askin' a few polite questions [To AUGUSTUS] You don't mind a few friendly questions?

AUGUSTUS [ill at ease] Oh, that's all right ^{if} ~~all~~ feel er.

POLICEMAN Righto — [Holds out hand across pole.]

AUGUSTUS [affecting not to notice hand] When you came up I was trying to make him see an argument

WATCHMAN [stolidly] You was trying to make me talk nonsense My Haugustus, indeed!

AUGUSTUS [hopelessly] Well, I think I'll say good night once more for the last time You're a good sort Bye-bye, officer

POLICEMAN Gently I'm a bit interested in you.

AUGUSTUS That's nice [Starts to move away.]

POLICEMAN No, don't go Please You're rather like a gentleman I'm looking for Suppose you come along o' me and have a nice warm and a nap at the station. [Neither he nor AUGUSTUS moves a step] If you ain't 'im no harm's done, and if you do happen to be the gent, how much nicer to be took and done with, instead of walking about all night. What do you say?

AUGUSTUS. I say good night

POLICEMAN. I thought so

→ [POLICEMAN stoops and runs under pole L into enclosure as AUGUSTUS runs out of opening in front of fire and off down R below square The POLICEMAN follows closely, fumbling for his whistle]

WATCHMAN I 'ad an idea as— [Comes out of enclosure and looks off below square Whistle heard WATCHMAN peers into distance Whistle repeated farther off] 'Ullo! 'E can't do it alone [Pause] I can't 'ardly see 'em [Pause] They're at the bend! [Whistle very far off] 'Ope to Gawd 'e won't be 'eard! [Whistle a little nearer] 'Ullo! W'y they're— [Goes to upper entrance and looks off] Yes, they are [Whistle considerably closer] 'Ere we

C*

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

go round the—— [Comes down and re-enters enclosure] I like to be out of the way. [Re-enters but

[Whistle very close to R. upper entrance. Re-enter

AUGUSTUS above square R, running and out of breath. He makes for exit down L, but as he reaches C. trips against low end of pole and falls. The POLICEMAN runs on R above square and pounces on him before he can rise, pulling him to his feet by the coat-collar. They are in front of enclosure and R. of it

AUGUSTUS [panting] All right You've nailed me I'll go quiet

POLICEMAN. Go quiet? You'd better! Let's have a look at you

[Holding AUGUSTUS by collar and wrist, starts him towards fire

AUGUSTUS [resisting] I'll go quiet Don't——

POLICEMAN Come over to the fire

AUGUSTUS [struggling fiercely] You don't know my face. You'll be sorry if——

POLICEMAN Why, ain't you pretty?

AUGUSTUS [angrily] You'll come to grief over that funny little way of yours. I'm your man right enough.

POLICEMAN I want old Stick-in-the-mud to have a look at you

AUGUSTUS No! No!

[Struggles fiercely

POLICEMAN Yes, ducky, yes.

AUGUSTUS. I warn you if you take me in sight of him—— You can look at me all you like at the station

POLICEMAN Let's look at you now.

AUGUSTUS I've warned you

POLICEMAN [getting him a step] You have, and thank you

AUGUSTUS. I told you if——

[Breaks off suddenly and ceases to resist

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

AUGUSTUS All right I'll—

[They reach the edge of the firelight AUGUSTUS suddenly bends down and, embracing POLICEMAN's knees, heaves him over his hip against pole, which falls with him AUGUSTUS, released, rushes off down R as before]

POLICEMAN *[scrambling to his feet]* He can't get round I'll—

[Runs off above square, blowing whistle AUGUSTUS immediately re-enters over railings]

AUGUSTUS He'll have a nice little scamper *[Goes up stage and looks cautiously after POLICEMAN Whistle heard He crosses behind shanty to exit down L]* Good night, boss!

WATCHMAN Good night, me lad! Good luck!

AUGUSTUS *[pause]* Good luck?

WATCHMAN Hadn't you better—

AUGUSTUS Half a mo' Your boy—

WATCHMAN *[impatiently]* Good Lord!

AUGUSTUS *[almost pleadingly]* Is is your wife as sure he's got on? Wouldn't his mother be pleased—

WATCHMAN She's dead

AUGUSTUS Dead I thought mothers waited till their boys came back Oh, well, good night

WATCHMAN Good night Be off! Good luck!

AUGUSTUS *[under his voice]* Dad *hails*

[Runs off down L A whistle heard in the distance R The WATCHMAN chuckles gruffly to himself]

CURTAIN

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

By LADY GREGORY

CHARACTERS

MIKE McINERNEY }
MICHAEL MISKELL } *paupers*
MRS DONOHUE, *a countrywoman*

THE names of Lady Gregory, W B Yeats, and J M Synge will always be honoured as the pioneers of the Irish theatre, which began as a dream in 1898, and materialized in tangible form in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, about five years later. Lady Gregory was an enthusiast for Irish drama performed by Irish players. She was a prolific writer of folk-plays and folk-histories—the latter, exemplified by “The White Cockade” and “The Canavans,” reviving the vogue of the chronicle play in a realistic vein which is so popular to-day.

Lady Gregory was a keen student of Irish character, and her greatest works are peasant dramas, occasionally tragic (as in “The Gaol Gate”), but generally comedies, like “The Rising of the Moon,” “Spreading the News,” “Hyacinth Halvey,” and “The Workhouse Ward.” Her rich humour derives from the racy dialogue of the island and from fantastic Irish situations, but fundamentally it is founded upon the whimsicalities of character, especially that of the Irish peasant.

A dictum of J M Synge may be applied with peculiar appropriateness to the plays of Lady Gregory “On the stage one must have reality and one must have joy. Every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple”

THE WORKHOUSE WARD¹

SCENE *A ward in Cloon Workhouse. The two old men in their beds.*

MICHAEL MISKELL Isn't it a hard case, Mike McInerney, myself and yourself to be left here in the bed, and it the feast-day of St Colman, and the rest of the ward attending on the Mass

MIKE MCINERNEY. Is it sitting up by the hearth you are wishful to be, Michael Miskell, with cold in the shoulders and with speckled shins? Let you rise up so, and you well able to do it, not like myself that has pains the same as tin-tacks within in my inside

MICHAEL MISKELL If you have pains within in your inside there is no one can see it or know of it the way they can see my own knees that are swelled up with the rheumatism, and my hands that are twisted in ridges the same as an old cabbage-stalk. It is easy to be talking about soreness and about pains, and they maybe not to be in it at all

MIKE MCINERNEY To open me and to analyse me you would know what sort of a pain and a soreness I have in my heart and in my chest. But I'm not one like yourself to be cursing and praying and tormenting the time the nuns are at hand, thinking to get a bigger share than myself of the nourishment and of the milk

MICHAEL MISKELL That's the way you do be picking at me and faulting me. I had a share and a good share

¹ Published separately by Messrs G P Putnam's Sons, Ltd. Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W C 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

in my early time, and it's well you know that, and the both of us reared in Skehanagh.

MIKE MCINERNEY. You may say that, indeed, we are both of us reared in Skehanagh Little wonder you to have good nourishment the time we were both rising, and you bringing away my rabbits out of the snare

MICHAEL MISKELL And you didn't bring away my own eels, I suppose, I was after spearing in the Turlough? Selling them to the nuns in the convent, you did, and letting on they to be your own For you were always a cheater and a schemer, grabbing every earthly thing for your own profit

MIKE MCINERNEY And you were no grabber yourself, I suppose, till your land and all you had grabbed wore away from you!

MICHAEL MISKELL If I lost it itself it was through the crosses I met with, and I going through the world I never was a rambler and a card-player like yourself, Mike McInerney, that ran through all and lavished it unknown to your mother!

MIKE MCINERNEY Lavished it, is it? And if I did, was it you yourself led me to lavish it or some other one? It is on my own floor I would be to-day and in the face of my family but for the misfortune I had to be put with a bad next-door neighbour that was yourself What way did my means go from me, is it? Spending on fencing, spending on walls, making up gates, putting up doors, that would keep your hens and your ducks from coming in through starvation on my floor, and every four-footed beast you had from preying and trespassing on my oats and my mangolds and my little lock of hay!

MICHAEL MISKELL Oh, to listen to you! And I striving to please you and to be kind to you, and to close my ears to the abuse you would be calling and letting out of your mouth To trespass on your crops, is it?

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

It's little temptation there was for my poor beasts to ask to cross the mering My God Almighty ! What had you but a little corner of a field ?

MIKE MCINERNEY And what do you say to my garden that your two pigs had destroyed on me the year of the big tree being knocked, and they making gaps in the wall.

MICHAEL MISKELL Ah, there does be a great deal of gaps knocked in a twelvemonth Why wouldn't they be knocked by the thunder, the same as the tree, or some storm that came up from the west ?

MIKE MCINERNEY It was the west wind, I suppose, that devoured my green cabbage ? And that rooted up my champion potatoes ? And that ate the gooseberries themselves from off the bush ?

MICHAEL MISKELL What are you saying ? The two quietest pigs ever I had, no way wicked and well ringed They were not ten minutes in it It would be hard for them to eat strawberries in that time, let alone gooseberries that's full of thorns

MIKE MCINERNEY They were not quiet but very ravenous pigs you had that time—as active as a fox, they were, killing my young ducks Once they had blood tasted you couldn't stop them

MICHAEL MISKELL And what happened myself the fair day of Esserkelly, the time I was passing your door ? Two brazened dogs that rushed out and took a piece of me I never was the better of it or of the start I got, but wasting from then till now !

MIKE MCINERNEY Thinking you were a wild beast they did, that had made his escape out of the travelling show, with the red eyes of you and the ugly face of you, and the two crooked legs of you that wouldn't hardly stop a pig in a gap Sure any dog that had any life in it at all would be roused and stirred seeing the like of you going the road !

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MICHAEL MISKELL I did well taking out a summons against you that time It is a great wonder you not to have been bound over through your lifetime, but the laws of England is queer.

MIKE MCINERNEY What ailed me that I did not summons yourself after you stealing away the clutch of eggs I had in the barrel, and I away in Ardrahan searching out a clocking hen.

MICHAEL MISKELL To steal your eggs, is it? Is that what you are saying now? [*Holds up his hands*] The Lord is in heaven, and Peter and the saints, and yourself that was in Ardrahan that day put a hand on them as soon as myself! Isn't it a bad story for me to be wearing out my days beside you the same as a spancelled goat Chained I am and tethered I am to a man that is ransacking his mind for lies!

MIKE MCINERNEY If it is a bad story for you, Michael Miskell, it is a worse story again for myself A Miskell to be next and near me through the whole of the four quarters of the year I never heard there to be any great name on the Miskells as there was on my own race and name.

MICHAEL MISKELL. You didn't, is it? Well, you could hear it if you had but ears to hear it Go across to Lisheen Crannagh and down to the sea, and to Newtown Lynch and the mills of Duras, and you'll find a Miskell, and as far as Dublin!

MIKE MCINERNEY What signifies Crannagh and the mills of Duras? Look at all my own generations that are buried at the Seven Churches And how many generations of the Miskells are buried in it? Answer me that!

MICHAEL MISKELL I tell you but for the wheat that was to be sowed there would be more side-cars and more common cars at my father's funeral—God rest his soul! —than at any funeral ever left your own door And,

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

as to my mother, she was a Cuffe from Claregalway, and it's she had the purer blood !

MIKE MCINERNEY. And what do you say to the banshee ? Isn't she apt to have knowledge of the ancient race ? Was ever she heard to screech or to cry for the Miskells ? Or for the Cuffes from Claregalway ? She was not, but for the six families, the Hyneses, the Foxes, the Faheys, the Dooleys, the McInerneys It is of the nature of the McInerneys she is, I am thinking, crying them the same as a king's children.

MICHAEL MISKELL It is a pity the banshee not to be crying for yourself at this minute, and giving you a warning to quit your lies and your chat and your arguing and your contrary ways , for there is no one under the rising sun could stand you I tell you, you are not behaving as in the presence of the Lord !

MIKE MCINERNEY Is it wishful for my death you are ? Let it come and meet me now and welcome, so long as it will part me from yourself ! And I say, and I would kiss the Book on it, I to have one request only to be granted, and I leaving it in my will, it is what I would request—nine furrows of the field, nine ridges of the hills, nine waves of the ocean, to be put between your grave and my own grave the time we will be laid in the ground !

MICHAEL MISKELL Amen to that ! Nine ridges, is it ? No, but let the whole ridge of the world separate us till the Day of Judgment ! I would not be laid anear you at the Seven Churches, I to get Ireland without a divide !

MIKE MCINERNEY And after that again ! I'd sooner than ten pound in my hand I to know that my shadow and my ghost will not be knocking about with your shadow and your ghost, and the both of us waiting our time I'd sooner be delayed in Purgatory ! Now, have you anything to say ?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MICHAEL MISKELL I have everything to say, if I had but the time to say it !

MIKE MCINERNEY [sitting up] Let me up out of this till I'll choke you !

MICHAEL MISKELL You scolding pauper, you ! ~~push~~

MIKE MCINERNEY [shaking his fist at him] Wait a while !

MICHAEL MISKELL [shaking his fist] Wait a while yourself !

MRS DONOHOE comes in with a parcel She is a countrywoman, with a frilled cap and a shawl She stands still a minute The two old men lie down and compose themselves

MRS DONOHOE They bade me come up here by the stair I never was in this place at all I don't know am I right Which, now, of the two of ye is Mike McInerney ?

MIKE MCINERNEY Who is it is calling me by my name ?

MRS DONOHOE Sure am n't I your sister, Honor McInerney that was, that is now Honor Donohoe

MIKE MCINERNEY So you are, I believe I didn't know you till you pushed anear me It is time indeed for you to come see me, and I in this place five year or more Thinking me to be no credit to you, I suppose, among that tribe of the Donohoes I wonder they to give you leave to come ask am I living yet or dead ?

MRS DONOHOE Ah, sure, I buried the whole string of them Himself was the last to go [Wipes her eyes] The Lord be praised he got a fine natural death Sure we must go through our crosses And he got a lovely funeral , it would delight you to hear the priest reading the Mass My poor John Donohoe ! A nice clean man, you couldn't but be fond of him Very severe on the tobacco he was, but he wouldn't touch the drink

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

MIKE MCINERNEY And is it in Curranroe you are living yet?

MRS DONOHOE It is so He left all to myself But it is a lonesome thing the head of a house to have died!

MIKE MCINERNEY I hope that he has left you a nice way of living?

MRS DONOHOE Fair enough, fair enough A wide lovely house I have, a few acres of grassland the grass does be very sweet that grows among the stones And as to the sea, there is something from it every day of the year, a handful of periwinkles to make kitchen, or cockles, maybe There is many a thing in the sea is not decent, but cockles is fit to put before the Lord!

MIKE MCINERNEY You have all that! And you without e'er a man in the house?

MRS DONOHOE It is what I am thinking, yourself might come and keep me company. It is no credit to me a brother of my own to be in this place at all

MIKE MCINERNEY I'll go with you! Let me out of this! It is the name of the McInerneys will be rising on every side!

MRS DONOHOE I don't know I was ignorant of you being kept to the bed

MIKE MCINERNEY I am not kept to it, but maybe an odd time when there is a colic rises up within me My stomach always gets better the time there is a change in the moon I'd like well to draw anear you My heavy blessing on you, Honor Donohoe, for the hand you have held out to me this day!

MRS DONOHOE Sure you could be keeping the fire in, and stirring the pot with a bit of Indian meal for the hens, and milking the goat, and taking the tacklings off the donkey at the door, and maybe putting out the cabbage plants in their time For when the old man died the garden died

MIKE MCINERNEY I could, to be sure, and be cutting

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

the potatoes for seed. What luck could there be in a place and a man not to be in it? Is that now a suit of clothes you have brought with you?

MRS DONOHOE It is so, the way you will be tasty coming in among the neighbours at Curranroe

MIKE MCINERNEY. My joy you are! It is well you earne i me! Let me up out of this! [He sits up and spreads out the clothes and tries on coat] That, now, is a good frieze coat . . . and a hat in the fashion . . .

[He puts on hat

MICHAEL MISKELL [alarmed] And is it going out of his you are, Mike McInerney?

MIKE MCINERNEY Don't you hear I am going? To Curranroe—I am going. Going I am to a place where [will get every good thing! ~~to eat~~ eat]

MICHAEL MISKELL And is it to leave me here after you, you will?

MIKE MCINERNEY [in a rising chant] Every good thing! The goat and the kid are there, the sheep and the lamb are there, the cow does be running, and she coming to be milked! Ploughing and seed-sowing, blossom at Christmas-time, the cuckoo speaking through the dark days of the year! Ah, what are you talking about? Wheat high in hedges, no talk about the rent! Salmon in the rivers as plenty as turf! Spending and getting and nothing scarce! Sport and pleasure, and music on the strings! Age will go from me, and I will be young again! Geese and turkeys for the hundreds, and drink for the whole world! ~~is~~

MICHAEL MISKELL Ah, Mike, is it truth you are saying, you to go from me and to leave me with rude people and with townspeople, and with people of every parish in the union, and they having no respect for me or no wish for me at all! ~~how shall the poor be~~ time

MIKE MCINERNEY. Whist, now, and I'll leave you . . . my pipe [Hands it over] And I'll engage it is

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

Honor Donohoe won't refuse to be sending you few ounces of tobacco an odd time, and neighbours coming to the fair in November or in the month of May

Deeper desire of my heart will tell us not

MICHAEL MISKELL Ah, what signifies tobacco? All that I am craving is the talk There to be no one at all to say out to whatever thought might be rising in my innate mind! To be lying here and no conversible person in it would be the abomination of misery

MIKE MCINERNEY Look now, Honor! It is what I often heard said, two to be better than one. Sure, if you had an old trouser was full of holes or a skirt wouldn't you put another in under it that might be as tattered as itself, and the two of them together would make some sort of a decent show?

MRS DONOHOE Ah, what are you saying? There is no holes in that suit I brought you now, but as sound it is as the day I spun it for himself

MIKE MCINERNEY It is what I am thinking, Honor. I do be weak an odd time any load I would carry it preys upon my side and this man does be weak an odd time with the swelling in his knees but the two of us together, it's not likely it is at the one time we would fail Bring the both of us with you, Honor, and the height of the castle of luck on you, and the both of us together will make one good hardy man!

MRS DONOHOE I'd like my job! Is it queer in the head you are grown asking me to bring in a stranger off the road?

MICHAEL MISKELL I am not, ma'am, but an old neighbour I am If I had forecasted this asking I would have asked it myself Michael Miskell I am, that was in the next house to you in Skehanagh!

MRS DONOHOE For pity's sake! Michael Miskell, is it? That's worse again Yourself and Mike that

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

never left fighting and scolding and attacking one another! Sparring at one another like two young pups, you were, and threatening one another after like two grown dogs!

MIKE MCINERNEY All the quarrelling was ever in the place it was myself did it. Sure, his anger rises fast and goes away like the wind. Bring him out with myself, now, Honor Donohoe, and God bless you!

MRS DONOHOE Well, then, I will not bring him out, and I will not bring yourself out, and you not to learn better sense. Are you making yourself ready to come?

MIKE MCINERNEY I am thinking, maybe . . . it is a mean thing for a man that is shivering into seventy years to go changing from place to place

MRS DONOHOE Well, take your luck or leave it All I asked was to save you from the hurt and the harm of the year.

MIKE MCINERNEY Bring the both of us with you or I will not stir out of this

MRS DONOHOE Give me back my fine suit so [*begins gathering up the clothes*], till I'll go look for a man of my own!

MIKE MCINERNEY Let you go so, as you are so unnatural and so disobliging, and look for some man of your own, God help him! For I will not go with you at all!

MRS DONOHOE It is too much time I lost with you, and dark night waiting to overtake me on the road Let the two of you stop together, and the back of my hand to you It is I will leave you there the same as God left the Jews!

[*She goes out. The old men lie down and are silent for a moment*

MICHAEL MISKELL Maybe the house is not so wide as what she says.

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

MIKE MCINERNEY Why wouldn't it be wide?

MICHAEL MISKELL Ah, there does be a good deal of muddling poor houses down by the sea.

MIKE MCINERNEY What would you know about wide houses? Whatever sort of a house you had yourself, it was too wide for the provision you had into it

MICHAEL MISKELL Whatever provision I had in my house, it was wholesome provision and natural provision Herself and her periwinkles! Periwinkles is a hungry sort of food

MIKE MCINERNEY Stop your impudence and your chat, or it will be the worse for you I'd bear with my own father and mother as long as any man would, but if they'd vex me I would give them the length of a rope as soon as another!

MICHAEL MISKELL I would never ask at all to go eating periwinkles

MIKE MCINERNEY [sitting up] Have you anyone to fight me?

MICHAEL MISKELL [whimpering] I have not, only the Lord!

MIKE MCINERNEY Let you leave putting insults on me so, and death picking at you!

MICHAEL MISKELL Sure, I am saying nothing at all to displease you It is why I wouldn't go eating periwinkles. I'm in dread I might swallow the pin

MIKE MCINERNEY Who in the world wide is asking you to eat them? You're as tricky as a fish in the full tide!

MICHAEL MISKELL Tricky, is it! Oh, my curse and the curse of the four-and-twenty men upon you! *all's!*

MIKE MCINERNEY That the worm may chew you from skin to marrow-bone! [Seizes his pillow.]

MICHAEL MISKELL [seizing his own pillow] I'll leave my death on you, you scheming vagabone!

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MIKE MCINERNEY. By cripes, I'll pull out your pineathers ! [Throwing pillow.]

MICHAEL MISKELL [*throwing pillow*]. You tyrant ! You big bully, you !

MIKE MCINERNEY [*throwing pillow and seizing mug*]. Take his so, you stobbing ruffian, you !

[They throw all within their reach at one another—, mugs, prayer-books, pipes, etc

CURTAIN

MR SAMPSON

By CHARLES LEE

CHARACTERS

CATHERINE STEVENS

CAROLINE STEVENS

MR SAMPSON

THIS delightful little comedy is a new variation on the eternal triangle theme. When two men fight to win a woman, or when two women compete for a man, the interest of the audience is generally biased in favour of one, even though the motives be queerly mixed. In "Mr Sampson" we find a bachelor in a dilemma because he is confronted with two equally attractive sisters, and therefore cannot make his choice. It reminds one of the famous 'free will' argument known as 'Buridan's Ass,' the said ass being placed at equal distances from two equally attractive bundles of hay. As the attraction was precisely equal the animal was unable to choose either, and therefore died of starvation.

Mr Sampson's final remark, "I ought to have been born a heathen Turk," suggests that bigamy might have solved the problem, but the suggestion need not be taken seriously. The humour of the play lies partly in the logical working out of a situation, partly in the unconscious humour of the characters. It needs to be acted with extreme simplicity and restraint.

¹ The author has written a number of stories, but "Mr Sampson" was his first play, and was awarded the Lord Howard de Walden Cup at the British Drama League's Festival of Community Drama, when it was performed by the Welwyn Garden City Theatre Society several years ago. His only other play is entitled "The Banns of Marriage."

MR SAMPSON¹

The scene represents the kitchen of a West Country cottage. At the back of the stage, in the centre, is a latticed window, with geraniums in pots on the inner sill. To the right of the window (from the spectator's point of view) is a door communicating with the front garden, to the left a tall grandfather's clock, beyond that again a cupboard. On the right side of the stage a dresser, well garnished with crockery, a small pile of books on one of the shelves. Beyond the dresser another door. On the left side a kitchen range, in which a fire is burning.

Beside a table in the middle of the room CAROLINE STEVENS, a gentle, timid, plump, soft-spoken woman of forty or so, sits darning a sock. As the curtain rises the clock strikes four. CAROLINE glances momentarily towards the clock and begins to talk to it, as people who are much alone are in the habit of talking to a cat or a canary. There are pauses when her work requires special attention, and now and again she repeats a phrase dreamily, as her thoughts wander.

CAROLINE Four o'clock, Grandf'er? Sister's late, an't she? She don't use to be so late market-day—you know that so well as I do 'Tisn' often you put *she* to shame. Wish I could say so much for myself. Four o'clock Saturday arternoon, and the baking not begun, and Mr Sampson's socks not finished mending—aw, scand'lous! I'm ashamed to look 'e in the face, Grandf'er, that I am—ashamed—to look 'e—in the face . . .

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W C 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York

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What's keeping of her, I wonder? She haven' been so late from market not these fifteen year. And Mr Sampson coming in any minute now to pay his rent, and looking for a bit of a chat, and me never knowing for the life of me what to say to 'm. Aisy enough talking to *you*, Grandf'er, but a raje, live man, that do ask questions and look to be answered back—that's different, and I haven' got used to him yet . . . He's another of your reg'lar ones, Grandf'er—slow and sure, like it might be yourself. And I often think he favour you about the face—round and solemn-like. And he growl in his throat when he's going to say something, just like you before you strike up . . . But you're an old friend, Grandf'er—oldest friend we got, and we'd never set eyes on *he* three months ago, so you needn' be jalous—no—Grandf'er needn' be jalous. [With a sigh she gets up, goes to the fire, and tends it, then wanders to the window and looks out for a moment, still talking] Yes, if you'll mind, it's just three month come Tuesday since he come to live next door, and considering of it one way it might be three year, and considering of it another way 'tis more like three weeks. But that's the way with Time, Grandf'er, and always will be, for all your stiddy tick-tocking. Ayther 'tis crawling around like a worm, or else . . . or else 'tis walloping along like a butcher's cart. . . . Aw me! . . . [By this time she is seated again] Sister's late, Grandf'er! Never knowed her to be so late before. If something should have happened!

[She starts at the sound of a tap at the garden door.

— It opens, and MR SAMPSON appears on the threshold. He is an oldish man, stiff in his movements, very deliberate of speech, a fringe of grey whiskers encircles his round red face. A shy confusion comes over CAROLINE. *— feels shy*

MR SAMPSON [after profoundly clearing a throat unaccustomed to much vocal exercise] Arternoon, marm!

MR SAMPSON

CAROLINE Mr Sampson?

MR SAMPSON [preening round] Sister in?

CAROLINE No, Mr Sampson, not yet. I'm getting a bit anxious She don't use to be later than four, and 'tis past that

MR SAMPSON Then you're all alone?

CAROLINE [acutely conscious of the fact] All alone [With an obvious effort] Won't 'e step inside, Mr Sampson?

MR SAMPSON [after thinking it over] No, thank 'e. Can do very well where I be Got a mossel o' bacca in my cheek, you see More convaynient for spitting out here. [He illustrates the convenience from behind a respectful hand] Thought I heard talking as I come up the path. Judged 'twas sister come home.

CAROLINE Talking? Aw, 'twas only me, chattering away to myself Leastways [with a bashful titter], I was convarsing a bit with Grandf'er here.

MR SAMPSON [craning his neck into the room] Grandf'er? Oh, ay, the clock! Convarsing with Grandf'er, eh? [With a short laugh] Well, now, there's a sarcumstance for 'e!

CAROLINE [nervously echoing his laugh] 'Tis foolishness, I allow But I often chat a bit with Grandf'er when I'm alone [Gathering a little confidence] He's capital company—most like a Christian Sister do often say he's as good as a man in the house You see, Mr Sampson, 'tis he that do rule our comings and our goings, telling us to do this and do that all the while now 'tis to get up and light the fire, and then 'tis to bustle and get dinner, and then, agin, 'tis to rake out the ashes and go to bed Yes, Grandf'er's master here, I believe So 'tis natural for two lonely females to look up to him and think a brave lot of him, when they haven' nobody else to be dependent on And there ain't a stiddier clock, nor a handsomer, in all the country

MR SAMPSON. A stately old chap, sure enough [A

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

pause, he shifts his feet; she looks down and makes a few stitches] Those my socks?

CAROLINE Yes, Mr Sampson. They're 'most done
[Another pause.] Hope you found the pasty to your satisfaction

MR SAMPSON. Capital pasty, to be sure! [He advances a step into the room] You take a lot of trouble about me, marm, you and your sister.

CAROLINE. No trouble at all, Mr Sampson. We couldn't do other, and you all alone next door with nobody to do for 'e, and no more notion how to do for yourself than a new-born baby.

MR SAMPSON I'm a terrible poor hand at the cookery, that's sartain. [He advances another step] Frying-pan, I don't say, but a man can't live by frying-pan alone And as for darning a sock—well, I've tried 'Twas like a fishing-net, the more I mended 'e more the holes came Well, I reckon I'm pretty and comfor'ble now. Never was so comfor'ble in my life.

CAROLINE [earnestly] Glad to hear 'e say so Anything we can do for 'e, you know, you've only to say the word

MR SAMPSON. Thank 'e, marm, you're very kind [He makes a further advance, and assumes a confidential air. Her timidity immediately returns in a flood] There is something I wanted to say—something partic'lar I got to tell 'e—came in for the purpose But, seeing as how it do consarn both of 'e, I reckon I'll wait till sister comes back

[He makes deliberate preparations for settling himself in a chair.

CAROLINE [in an agony of nervous apprehension at the prospect of a tête-à-tête] Can't think what's keeping of her all this while. Never before have she been so late. Mr Sampson—

MR SAMPSON. Marm?

MR SAMPSON

CAROLINE. Would 'e mind—if 'tisn' asking too much of 'e—would 'e mind going up the road a step or two, to see if you can catch a glimp' of her? ~~of her~~

MR SAMPSON [rising without alacrity]. Sartainly, marm, if you do wish No occasion for 'e to worry, though She can take care of herself very well Howsomever, if 'twill aise your mind I'll go so fur as the cross-roads and take a observation [Going] Don't you fret, she'll turn up all right [He goes.]

CAROLINE [going to the window and watching him out of sight] He's walking awful stiff, Grandf'er A shame to turn him out agin' just when he was settling himself down comfor'ble But I couldn' do no otherwise 'Tis all right when sister's here too, but to set down alone in a room with a man—no! I couldn' bring myself to it, even if 'twas a proper thing for a maiden to do [She turns away from the window and begins clearing the table, continuing meanwhile her colloquy with Grandf'er] Something partic'lar to tell us? I wonder, now— [In some agitation] Can't be going to give notice! Aw, nonsense! Don't be telling such foolishness, Grandf'er! He ain't one of your changeable ones: you know better'n that "Never so comfor'ble in my life"—those were his words, you heard him yourself. Wonder what 'a can be, though [A sudden amazing thought strikes her] Aw, if it should be— Aw, ridic'lous! He've never given no sign of that by word or look Besides, if 'twas that, Grandf'er, don't 'e see he wouldn' wish to tell but one of us, whichever 'twas, and he said partic'lar 'twas both of us he wanted to say it to. Aw, well, us'll know presently [She goes up to the clock] Aw, Grandf'er! Ten past four! Something's happened, I know it have! [She sinks into a chair and begins to whimper] Aw, Cath'rine! Aw, deary dear! [She turns rapidly on the clock] Tick-tock, tick-tock! You don't care! If 'twas Judgment Day you'd go on with your tick-tock

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till the fire catched 'e. If the truth was known you're nothing but a cage of wheels arter all, and no more heart to 'e than a Waterbury watch [Remorsefully] There, I didn' mane to spake sharp to 'e ; but you know how 'tis when things go wrong [Almost in tears] You—you struck seventeen yourself when we moved 'e last spring-cleaning . . . Ah ! [Hearing a sound outside, she runs to the window.] 'Tis all right, Grandf'er ; here she is at last, thanks be !

[The door is flung open, CATHERINE comes in hurriedly and sinks exhausted on a chair. She is older by several years than CAROLINE, and far more vivacious. Her movements are quick and abrupt, like a bird's, and she gesticulates freely when speaking. On her arm is a basket containing the week's supply of provisions.]

CAROLINE [in an ecstasy of apprehension] Cath'rine, what is it ? Aw, sister, what's the matter ?

CATHERINE [in a faint voice, panting heavily] Aw, my dear nerves ! Aw, that I should live to see the day ! [She sets the basket down] Never shall we hold up our heads again ! . . . Sister, we're disgraced for ever !

CAROLINE. Sister ! ~~she starts weeping~~

[She drops into her chair and begins to weep]

CATHERINE [recovering her self-possession with an effort]. Stop crying, Caroline, till I give 'e something to cry about ! I can do that, I promise 'e. [She begins her tale with a kind of melancholy gusto, and with immense volubility] I fancied whether something was up last week, when I see some of 'em' putting their heads together and odding and grinning upon me—Mrs Parkyn, the old enom, she was one, and Grace Budley was another, nd when they two put their heads together they ben't oncocting no testimonials, you may be sure But I idn' take no notice, I'd scorn to take notice of the books of such as they. Well, to-day I sold the chickens

MR SAMPSON

—chickens are down to one-and-nine, and lucky to get that—I sold the chickens, and I bought the flour and the sugar and the meat—nice bit of fat pork and six-penn'orth of gravy beef—and everything but the butter [getting up and taking off her hat, etc] butter's terrible scarce this week, gone up twopence, and everybody sold out, all but Mrs Parkyn—she's always the last to get rid of hers, and good reason why—well, I was bound to get *some* butter, if 'twas only her dirty old muck, so I went and bought a pound off her, and I won't say but what I might have sniffed to it a bit when I took it up, but she didn't say nothing, not till I'd paid her and she'd got the money safe in her gown-pocket—trust her for seeing to that first—and then she said, “Very good butter, Miss Stevens,” says she, daring of me, like, to say ‘twasn’t very good butter, but I wasn’t going to tell no lies to plaise the likes of she, you may be sure, so I said, “Us’ll have to make it do, Mrs Parkyn, seeing there an’t no better to be had,” says I, so then she up and say, “You didn’t use to be so partic’lar,” says she “Reckon your fancy man must have a terrible delicate stomach,” says she

CAROLINE [*in horrified bewilderment*] Fancy man! Sister! Whoever—

CATHERINE [*grimly*]. Only one man just hereabouts that I know by

CAROLINE [*gasping*] Mr Sampson! ~~you’re only a cat~~

CATHERINE [*with stony self-possession*] That’s the chap. our fancy man—yourn and mine, and when she said the word you might have knocked me down with a feather—couldn’t find a word to answer back, and I could feel myself going black-red all over So Grace Budley—she was standing by waiting her chance, I don’t doubt, the old cat—so she up and say, “Well may you blush, Cath’rine Stevens,” says she. “If you’ll take a friendly word from me,” says she, “you’ll hurry up,

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

you and that half-baked sister of yours, and make the best of a poor job," says she, "and get your old Sampson to make a h-honest woman of one or the other of 'e so soon as may be," says she [CAROLINE screams and buries her face in her apron. CATHERINE shows signs of breaking down, but controls herself and continues] Shameful, so 'tis! We've always kept ourselves to ourselves, and never spoke a hard word nor a scand'lous word agin nobody How can't they leave us alone? [She goes to the fire and pokes it] Something's got to be done, and done to once too [After a moment's cogitation] Where is he?

CAROLINE [in broken phrases, muffled by her apron and shaken with spasms] 'A was here just now. . . . Got something partic'lar to say to us Wouldn't say it, not till you come home. . . . Went out to look for 'e up the road

CATHERINE I came round by the path over the downs, that's what made me so late. I wasn't anxious to be meeting people by the road, as you may guess [She sits down] Hm! Got something partic'lar to say to us, have 'um? Well, p'raps we'll have something partic'lar to say to he!

CAROLINE [dropping her apron] Sister! You'll never tell him! I'll die of shame if you tell him!

CATHERINE [irresolutely]. I don't know. Something's got to be done, if only I can think what My poor old head—'tis all of a maze!

CAROLINE [starting up] Sister! The gate! I heard the latch! Somebody's coming!

CATHERINE [darting to the window] It's him! He shan't come in, though! Never agin shall he set foot in this house! [She rushes to the door and bolts it] There!

[With eyes fixed on the door, they await the event in breathless silence The door is tapped gently After an interval the latch is lifted and rattled Another pause, and MR SAMPSON's voice is heard.

MR SAMPSON

MR SAMPSON Anybody home?

CATHERINE [going to the door and speaking through it] Grieved to say it, Mr Sampson, but you can't come in

MR SAMPSON How? What's up with 'e?

CATHERINE I can't tell 'e, but you mustn't come in Will 'e plaise to go away, Mr Sampson?

MR SAMPSON [after a pause, for consideration] No, I reckon Not till I know what's the matter

¶ CATHERINE [in despair] Aw, dear! I beg of 'e—go!

MR SAMPSON [with slow emphasis] Not till I know what's up. If you'll open door you can tell me comfor'ble I won't come in if you don't wish, but I'm bound to know what's up

CATHERINE [to CAROLINE, in a horrified whisper] He won't go! What's to be done? [CAROLINE shakes her head miserably] If I should tell him— [CAROLINE throws up her hands in terror] He won't go if I don't tell him something I'll wrap it up so well as I can He'll be off quick enough when he know what it is He shan't look us in the face—I'll take care of that [Nerving herself to the desperate act, she withdraws the bolt opens the door an inch or so, and sets her shoulder against it] Keep outside, if you plaise We can't look 'e in the face If we must tell 'e we must, but we can never look 'e in the face agin

MR SAMPSON So bad as that?

CATHERINE Worse! Worse than anything you could think for! [With a tremendous effort] Mr Sampson, they're talking about us.

MR SAMPSON Us?

CATHERINE You and we 'Tis all over the country—scand'lous talk Aw, that I should live to see the day!

MR SAMPSON [patiently] If you'll kindly give me the partic'lars, marm

CATHERINE [on the verge of tears] We never thought no harm 'Twas only ~~negligently~~ to offer to do for 'e,

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and you all alone and so helpless. 'Tis a sin and a shame to say such things!

MR SAMPSON [*inexhaustibly patient*]. Say what things?

CATHERINE Say—[*with a rush*]—say that 'tis high time you took and married one of us!

[In trembling expectation they await the result. It comes—first a long low whistle; then, to their amazement, an unmistakable chuckle.] CATHERINE shrinks back from the door, it swings open, and MR SAMPSON is revealed, broadly smiling.

MR SAMPSON That's a stale old yarn Heard 'un weeks ago Don't mind telling 'e, I mightn' have thought of it else

CATHERINE [*bewildered*] Thought of what?

MR SAMPSON [*placidly*] Why, courting of 'e, to be sure.

CATHERINE [*gasping*] You don't mane to say you—

MR SAMPSON Yes, I be, though. This fortnit come Sunday, if you'll kindly take it so, and no offence. [To CAROLINE] The very thing I was coming in to talk about Cur'ous how things do turn out!

CATHERINE But—we never noticed nothing

MR SAMPSON. No—'tisn' to be supposed you would. 'Tis like the cooking, you see, I'm a terrible poor hand at it Now 'tis out Ben't vexed, I hope?

CATHERINE Aw, no! But, Mr Sampson—

MR SAMPSON There, think it over, will 'e? There's the saving to consider of, money and trouble both And I've put by a pound or two Not so young as I was, but we're none of us that And not so dreadful old, nuther. Wouldn' think of parting you, reckon we could be pretty and comfor'ble together, the three of us, though, of course, I can't marry but one of 'e. So talk it over, will 'e? I'll be round agin this evening

[He disappears CAROLINE sits down, overwhelmed

CATHERINE, after a moment of blank bewilderment, goes to the door and calls out

MR SAMPSON

CATHERINE Mr Sampson! . . . Will 'e plaise come back for a minute!

MR SAMPSON [returning] Well, marm? SM

CATHERINE [greatly embarrassed] Ascuse my asking, but—would 'e mind telling *which* one you were thinking of—of courting?

MR SAMPSON Now you'll be laughing upon me Which one? Well, I don't know which one, and that's the truth [Cheerfully] But it don't make no odds Settle it between yourselves, I ben't noways partic'lar

CATHERINE [with an involuntary giggle] La, Mr Sampson! Whoever heard tell of such a thing? [She sits down

MR SAMPSON [chuckling quietly] That's right Laugh so much as you've a mind to Sister laughing too? [He peers at CAROLINE, who titters nervously] Now we're comfor'ble Reckon I can step inside now, and no scandal [He shuts the door, takes a chair, spreads his hands on his knees, and surveys the sisters with a broad-beaming countenance] Yes, I'm like the cat in the bonfire—don't know which course to steer I've turned it over this way, and I've rolled it over that way, and I can't come to no conclusion Always seeing of e' together, you see, I can't part 'e nohow, no more than milk from water But it don't matter, as I said If you'll be so kind as to settle it up between yourselves—

CATHERINE [emphatically] We couldn't do that

MR SAMPSON [with an inquiring glance at CAROLINE] Couldn't 'e, now?

CAROLINE [shaking her head] 'Twouldn't be proper

MR SAMPSON [resignedly] Well, you know best Only I don't azackly see— Hm!

[With his eyes on the ground, he ponders over the problem The sisters, tensely still, stare straight before them He lifts his head and looks in CAROLINE's direction

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

CAROLINE [*hurriedly, without meeting his eye*] Cath'rine's the best to manage things.

[*He looks hopefully at CATHERINE.*

CATHERINE [*in haste*]. Caroline's the best cook by far

MR SAMPSON [*thumping his knee*] That's where 'tis! The pair of 'e rolled up together'd make a complete masterpiece; a man couldn't look for a better wife than what the two of 'e'd make. That's where 'tis, nor I can't see no way out of it—not in a Christian country. [*Meditatively*] Ah, these heathen Turks—they know a thing or two arter all, don't they?

CATHERINE [*greatly shocked*] Mr Sampson, I wonder at 'e!

MR SAMPSON 'Tisn' to be thought of, I know that But I can't think upon no other way. [*A bright idea strikes him.*] Without we should spin up a ha'penny and bide by the fall of 'un.

CATHERINE [*more shocked than ever*] Never in this house!

MR SAMPSON. Don't see how we shouldn't. 'Tis just the same as casting lots, and that's a good Scripture observance. The reg'lar way with these old patriarchs, so I'm given to understand—only 'twas shekels with them, I reckon. But shekels or ha'pennies, 'tis all one.

CATHERINE [*dubiously*] 'Tis uncommon like pitch-and-toss, and I can't fancy Abraham and Isaac a-doing of it. But if you're sure 'tis Scriptural—

MR SAMPSON Sound Bible doctrine, my word for it! [To CAROLINE] An't that so, marm?

CAROLINE [*shyly*] I mind a text in Proverbs which do say, "The lot causeth contentions to cease" *quarrels*

MR SAMPSON [*triumphantly*] See there, now! "The lot causeth contentions to cease!" Aimed straight at our case! Out of Proverbs too! Old Solomon's the chap for we! See how he settled that argyment about

MR SAMPSON

the baby! And there was two ladies in that! Well, then? [He looks inquiringly at CATHERINE, who shakes her head dubiously, but offers no further opposition. He feels in his pocket, produces a handful of coins, chooses one, and holds it up] Now, if 'a should turn up the old Queen, then 'tis Cath'rine, but if 'tis the young lady with the pitch-fork, then Caroline's the one. And up she goes! [He spins the coin, but blunders in his attempt to catch it. It falls in a corner. He goes down on his hands and knees to recover it, while the sisters sit valiantly struggling to retain their composure] Well, I'm darned! [He rises to his feet, holding out the halfpenny] If it had been a lime-ash floor, now!

CATHERINE [faintly] What's wrong?

MR SAMPSON Fell in a crack in the floor, my dear. Sticking there edge up, and no head to 'un, nor yet no tail. Old Solomon himself couldn't make nothing by 'un. But how come you to have a timber-floor to your kitchen when mine's lime-ash?

CAROLINE 'Twas Father's doing when the houses were built. He always liked to take his boots off of a evening, and lime-ash is that cold-natured, 'tis apt to give 'e chilblains through your stockings.

MR SAMPSON [sitting down] Well, to see how things do turn out!

CAROLINE [solemnly] 'Twas ordained!

CATHERINE [with equal solemnity] A token, sure enough! And Father's eyes upon us this very minute, I shouldn't wonder. Mr Sampson, I doubt 'tis all foolishness, and we'd best say no more about it.

MR SAMPSON I don't see that. If your father didn't choose to wear slippers that an't no lawful reason why I shouldn't get married if I want to. Must try some other way, that's all. [He ponders]

CAROLINE [timidly] If we should wait a bit, Mr Sampson keeping away from us meanwhile, p'raps his heart would speak.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MR SAMPSON [*dubiously*]. So 'a might ; and then, again, 'a mightn'. A mazy old organ, 'a b'lieve.

CATHERINE. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, so they say.

MR SAMPSON That's very well, but how if 'a should make it grow fonder of both of 'e ? Where'd us be then ? But we'll try if you like, though I fear 'tisn' much use [Rising] Queer state of things, to be sure ! Like one of these mixed-up old yarns in the story-books. Some capital yarns in these story-books, though I'm given to understand they're mostly lies ; and by what I can see—

CATHERINE [*stamping her foot*]. I've no patience with 'e, drolling along with your story-books when you ought to be down on your hands and knees asking our pardon for bringing us to such a pass ! A man of your age, and don't know how to make up his own mind ! I've no patience with 'e !

MR SAMPSON [*gazing at her admiringly*] Ah ! Some spirit there ! You make me feel as if I was home again, living with my sister She's just such another Many's the time she've lerruped me across the head with the rolling-pin when I wasn't quick enough about something to plaise her And nobody ever made a better wife than she—twice over too. I wonder, now—

[*He continues to stare reflectively at CATHERINE, until, on CAROLINE's making an involuntary movement, he transfers his gaze to her.*] Well, I don't know. Like to like, they say, and I'm a quiet one myself And so fur as looks do go. . . . [He looks from one to the other, scratching his head] Aw, I don't know. [To CAROLINE] Well, marm, there an't nothing else for it that I can see, so we'll try your plan. [He goes to the door and pauses there] All the same, I can't help wishing I'd been born a heathen Turk.

[He goes out The sisters remain sitting in silence
For the first time in their lives a veil of reserve

MR SAMPSON

is drawn between them, and each is obviously constrained and uncomfortable in the other's presence
CATHERINE *is the first to stir*

CATHERINE *[rising and speaking stiffly]*. Getting on for half-past four Time to pitch baking

CAROLINE *[rising and going on with her preparations]* I'll make a heavy cake, I reckon

CATHERINE *[sniffing contemptuously]* You can if you've a mind to I've no opinion of your heavy cake, nor never had, you know that But plaise yourself

CAROLINE *[frightened, but holding her own]* I'll make one, 'a b'lieve *[She goes to the cupboard]* Where's the flour?

CATHERINE In the basket, of course? Where else should 'a be? *[She picks up the basket, sets it on the table with a bang, and distributes the various parcels, some on the table, some in the cupboard]* There! Paddle away with your old heavy cake! I'm going to see to the chickens

[She goes out by the side-door

CAROLINE *[letting her hands fall suddenly in the midst of her preparations, and miserably appealing to the clock]* Aw, Grandf'er! What's up with sister that she should spake so sharp to me? And what's up with me? I nearly answered her back! Aw, me! *[She continues her work listlessly]* 'Twon't be much of a cake, I fear, Grandf'er I don't hardly know what I'm doing
There! If I hadn' nearly forgot the eggs!

[She goes out by the side-door, and returns immediately with a basket of eggs, one of which she breaks into a cup As she is doing so CATHERINE returns, casts a rapid glance at the table, and hardens into stone at the sight of the egg-basket

CATHERINE *[in a tense whisper, pointing at the basket]* You've been taking those Wyandotte eggs!

CAROLINE *[after a horrified pause, faintly]* S'posing I have!

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

CATHERINE [*raising her voice*]. You know very well I was going to set Toppy on those eggs to-day !

CAROLINE [*trembling, and clutching the table for support*]. S'posing I did !

CATHERINE [*in a still higher key*] Then how come you to take those eggs ?

CAROLINE I—I shall take what eggs I've a m-mind to—so there !

CATHERINE [*on her top note, without any stops*]. A mean trick so 'tis to take my eggs what I'd been saving up for Toppy and she in her box this very minute as you do very well know wearing her heart and feathers out over the chaney nest-egg, the poor fond little beauty ! Of all the mean tricks, to take my eggs—

CAROLINE [*with a wretchedly poor attempt at sarcasm*] Aw, you and your bistly old eggs ! [She bursts into tears.

CATHERINE [*running to her*]. Sister ! Sister dear ! [They embrace and mingle their tears] To think of it ! All these years with never a cross word, and now—— Aw, drat the man !

CAROLINE [*shocked*] Sister !

CATHERINE [*revelling in her profanity*] Drat the man, I say ! I wish we'd never set eyes upon 'um ! Sarve him right if we sent him about his business

CAROLINE. Sister ! When we've both as good as promised to him ! [She sits down] Besides, he wouldn't go. He's awful obstinate, for all his quiet ways

CATHERINE [*viciously*] A week's notice'll settle him quick enough.

CAROLINE. Cath'rine, we couldn't ! Good man—to be slighted by two in one day, and be turned out of house and home beside ! We couldn't !

CATHERINE [*relenting*] It do seem hard But we can't go on like this, that's plain.

CAROLINE P'raps he'll make up his mind after all

CATHERINE That'd be worse and worse. He can't

MR SAMPSON

choose but one of us, and then where'll the other be?
Tell me that

CAROLINE [drawing a long breath]. Sister dear—I—I
ben't in no partic'lar violence to get married.

CATHERINE [sternly] Caroline Stevens, there's the
Bible 'pon the shelf Lay your hand to 'un and say
that agin if you can

CAROLINE [hiding her face in her hands] I—can't!

CATHERINE No, and the same for me And here
we be, the two of us, careering around arter one man
At our age too—'tis shameful! Two silly old women
—that's what we are!

CAROLINE [shuddering] Aw, don't, sister!

CATHERINE [relentlessly] Two—silly—old—women!
But it shan't be so! Thanks be, I've got some sense
left in my brain, though my heart's a caudle of foolish-
ness It shan't be so The longer he stay the worse
'twill be How couldn' he make up his mind before
he spoke? 'Twouldn' have happened so then.

CAROLINE 'Twas forced upon him to speak

CATHERINE So 'twas I mustn' be hard upon him
'Twas Doom, I reckon, and better if Doom should
keep to his battles and murders and sudden deaths,
'stead of coming and plaguing quiet, dacent folk like
we Well, Doom shan't have it all his own way, nuther
There shan't be no jalous wife nor no sinful-thoughted
sister-in-law in this locality

CAROLINE Sister! Such dreadful talk!

CATHERINE 'Tis my duty to spake plain There's
bound to be suffering come out of it, but anyhow we
can choose to suffer respectable Go he shall!

CAROLINE [at the window] Cath'rine! He's coming
back! And, aw, if I do live, he've got gloves on!

CATHERINE Gloves! Then he've made up his mind
already! But it's too late now, and he shan't name
no name, not if I can stop him 'Twill be harder still

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

if we know [Rapidly, in a low voice] Now, Caroline, you're too soft for this job You leave him to me, don't say a word, and, whatever you do, don't start crying We've got to be hard or we'll never get rid of him. Hoosh!

They brace themselves for the ordeal The door opens, and MR SAMPSON appears His hands are encased in enormous black kid gloves, a substantial cabbage rose adorns the lapel of his coat; his face is one consistent solid smile

CATHERINE [with a rush] Mr Sampson, you'll kindly take a week's notice from to-day.

[His smile slowly crumbles, and is as slowly replaced by an expression of ineffable astonishment His eyes search the room for symptoms of universal disintegration CAROLINE begins to whimper

MR SAMPSON [jeebly] I'm a dazy old bufflehead, I know, and I don't azackly seem to get to the rights o' this

CATHERINE [wildly]. There an't no rights to it! Will 'e stop snooling, sister! 'Tis all as wrong as can be, and time to put an end to it. Nor you mustn't ask why, for we never can tell 'e We're grieved to put 'e out in any way, and we're grieved to part with 'e, but go you must, and no questions asked

MR SAMPSON [collecting himself, and speaking with quiet dignity]. If I ben't mistook, marm, there was words passed between us consarning matrimony

CATHERINE Foolish words! Foolisher words never were spoke! They've got to be took back

MR SAMPSON [continuing stolidly] If I ben't mistook I was told to go away and make up my mind—or my heart, as you may say—if so be I could

CATHERINE It's too late Say no more about it, and we'll be thankful to 'e all our lives

MR SAMPSON [glancing for corroboration first at his button-

MR SAMPSON

hole, then at his gloves] If I ben't mistook I've now returned to say I've come to a conformable conclusion at last I've come to say—with doo respect to the other lady, who's good enough for anybody—I've come to say I've pitched my ch'ice on the lady I should wish to commit matrimony with And the name of that lady—

CATHERINE [*interrupting him, with her hands shielding her ears*] Don't! You mustn't! You shan't! 'Tis hard enough already, don't go to make it harder Which-ever 'tis, her answer have got to be "No" An't that so, Caroline? [CAROLINE assents speechlessly] CATHERINE continues in a softer tone] With best thanks all the same, and hoping you won't think too hardly of us, and never shall we think other than kindly of you, and proud we'd have been, ayther one of us, if it hadn't been ordained otherwise, as you'll mind we said to once when the ha'penny stood on edge, and— Aw, will 'e go, and not stand staring there like a stuck pig!

MR SAMPSON [*stiffening his back*]. Very well, marm [He begins peeling off his gloves] I ben't one to force myself on nobody [Intent on the gloves] Nor I ben't going to state no grievances . . . nor ask no questions . . . nor mention no names [He rolls the gloves up in a ball

CATHERINE [*sniffing*] You'll spile 'em. Give 'em here [She takes the gloves from him, smoothes them out, lays them together, turns one neatly inside out over the other, and gives them back to him

MR SAMPSON Thank 'e Bought 'em for a funeral I didn't go to, never put 'em on till to-day. [Putting them in his pocket] Queer how things do turn out Well, if I got to go, then the sooner the better [Taking the flower from his coat and laying it on the table] Meant for the lady of my ch'ice, not to mention no names The sooner the better, so I reckon I'll be off now [Fumbling in his pocket] I can get a bed at the inn down

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

yonder—capital beds at the inn, so I'm told—and I'll send up for my bits of things later on [Counting out some silver on the table] Three shillings—rent for this week and next, according to the law of the land.

CATHERINE [quite overcome] Mr Sampson, we couldn't think of taking—

MR SAMPSON [raising an implacable hand]. If you plaise, marm, according to the law of the land, and not wishing to be beholden to nobody. And that's about all, I think. [At the door] Good-bye

CATHERINE Won't 'e shake hands before you go?

MR SAMPSON No, I don't think so. 'Tis the Christian thing to do, I know, but there an't no mistake about it—I ought to have been born a heathen Turk

[He goes out A miserable silence, broken at last by CAROLINE's wailing voice.

CAROLINE He'll scorn us all his life!

CATHERINE [valiantly defying her own misery] We've done what's right, so it don't matter what he think of us I don't care, for one

[The discarded flower catches her eye She takes it up and lifts it to her face.

CAROLINE [putting out her hand] Give it to me I'll take care of it

CATHERINE [whipping it behind her back] Meant for the lady of his ch'ice. Maybe you think—

CAROLINE I've so much right as you to think—

[They confront each other with hostile looks The crisis passes, with CAROLINE in a renewed fit of sobbing, with CATHERINE in resolute action

CATHERINE It shan't be so! [She goes to the fire and drops the flower in] And there's a end to it all, and a proper end too—dust and ashes And now, sister, crying won't help us, but work will, or so they say else Time to get on with the baking Come, bustle!

[The curtain falls as they silently set to work

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

A PLAY OF THE DAY BEFORE
YESTERDAY

By RACHEL FIELD

CHARACTERS

THE BOUND-OUT GIRL

THE PEDLAR

THE WIDOW BOGGS

HIRAM, *the Widow Boggs' son*

SCENE *A New England kitchen in the early eighteen-bundreds* *The curtain falls to denote the passing of some eight hours*

Miss RACHEL FIELD's little play makes a powerful appeal to the youthful imagination, because it dramatizes youth's greatest temptation. Mephistopheles may offer the choice between hard work and pleasure, or between poverty and luxury, but the most terrible alternative is between a life of comfortable security expressed in prose and a life of romantic adventure expressed in poetry. The strolling fiddler, with his wistful melody, represents the call to renounce a safe existence in order to live. It is the great gamble—the Prunella theme. Miss Tennyson Jesse handled the same subject in her first novel The Milky Way, though the musician in this story was a piper who played Dvorak's Humoresque.

Miss Field's appeal is to the emotions and sensibilities rather than to the intellect. Her poignant play "The Patchwork Quilt," included in the fourth series of One-act Plays of To-day, is another example of her gentle handling of the humour and pathos of daily life. "Cinderella Married," a delicate treatment of a great theme, may be considered one of the possible sequels to "The Londonderry Air."

Miss Field was not well known in this country until the appearance of her long novel All This and Heaven Too. In the film version it made an impression on millions to whom her name was previously quite unknown.

THE LONDONDERRY AIR¹

SCENE The kitchen of a remote New England farmhouse
It is a bright, sunshiny morning in the autumn, and a girl is rolling out dough at a table C—a young girl in a plain, quaintly made calico dress and apron. Her hair is very red, and she is not pretty according to the plump, pink-and-white edicts of her day. She is light and quick of motion as she steps about from the table to an old brick oven, part of the great open fireplace which occupies most of the back wall. A crane and kettle hang there, and various pots and pans are piled in a sink or on another table down L, there is also a couple of chairs. A churn stands in the corner, up R some bits of blue-and-white china on shelves, and a red geranium in the window L. A door R leads outdoors, this stands half open when the curtain rises. The door opposite up L leads into another room of the house.

GIRL [singing with cheerful unconcern] *freely*
"Hark from the tombs a doleful sound—

[She punctuates the words by thumps with her rolling-pin]

My ears attend the cry
Ye living men come view the ground
Where you must shortly lie"

[There is a knock at the door R, and a brown face suddenly peers round it. It is a thin face, with twinkling dark eyes and a shock of wild black hair. It is followed by a thin body in shabby clothes]

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MAN [*in a rich voice, with a hint of brogue and a lingering relish over each phrase*] Good day to you, Lady of the House, though it's a queer sort of a tune you do be singing

GIRL 'Tisn't a tune, mister, it's a hymn *religous*

MAN It is; more's the pity I'm thinking the Lord God Himself wouldn't want to be claiming such a poor one.

GIRL [*shocked*] Oh, dear, you hadn't ought to say things like that.

MAN It's the truth, and I can speak it as well as the next one, though when it comes to lying I can do better nor most [He has pushed door wide, and is half in

GIRL [*fearfully*] If you're a tramp you mustn't come in

MAN [*taking a step farther*] But I am in, colleen

GIRL [*with the rolling-pin in her right hand*] Then you must go right out again. The Widow Boggs doesn't like tramps

MAN. Oh, doesn't she, now; it's a thousand pities.

GIRL It's her kitchen, and you can't stay in it.

MAN [*persuasively*] Well, now, I could be taking a bite on the doorstep [Pointing behind him

GIRL. And I'm not to give victuals to any as asks.

MAN. I haven't been asking for any [Eyeing her carefully] It's a queer thing, now, a young slip of a girl like you singing of death and the tomb on a fine September morning

GIRL [*glancing towards window L*] I expect it is a nice morning I've been too busy to go farther'n the back stoop

MAN. There's a shine on every leaf and grass-blade that would be blindin' the two eyes in your head —

GIRL [*admiring him in spite of her scruples*] I never heard a tramp talk like you before *Wants*

MAN [*grinning*] Sure, an' there never was one the like o' me before [Drawing a step nearer] Did you ever

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

think o' that now, colleen—this great ball of a world ploughing its way through space and the centuries, an' never two creatures the same, never at all, at all?

GIRL [looking at him wonderingly] Why, no, I never did. It's kind of solemn-sounding, like the Bible when the Reverend Simpson reads it Sundays [Suddenly she begins to sniff, remembering the cookies in the oven] Oh, mercy me, that batch'll be burned to a crisp! [Leaving him to dart over to the Dutch oven, and taking out pan ruefully The MAN draws nearer and also sniffs] Oh, my, they're black as anything! [About to bring them to the table C

MAN [peering at them] I don't suppose you'd be letting me taste a few I've got no objection to a little healthy char, especially when I made my breakfast of green apples four hours back

GIRL [looking again at him and hesitating as she brings pan to table] There couldn't be any harm in that exactly [She sets them down before him] Only you mustn't pass on the word you got anything We don't hold with tramps round here

MAN [seating himself comfortably on the stool R. of the table to eat] Not even when they've got a pack o' goods to peddle? [Pointing to the one he has left on doorstep

GIRL [eyeing it curiously] The Widow Boggs says a pedlar will always try to cheat you, but I like to see what they have in their packs

MAN [eating the cookies with relish] Let you be giving me a sup from that pan of milk yonder [pointing to the table down L], and I'll show you the lot with pleasure

GIRL [falling more and more under his spell] It's only buttermilk left from churning [Crossing to his right] I dassent give you any other, for the Widow set the morning's herself But you can have all o' this I was just carryin' it out to the pig [Bringing it over to him

MAN [helping himself] Now, I wouldn't be the man to rob a pig A pig's a fine animal, for all anyone

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

may say, and a gifted one too. Did you ever hear how a pig is able to see the wind?

GIRL [shaking her head] No.

MAN It's as true as the nose on your face, and in Ireland they do be holding the pig in great reverence for it

GIRL [laughing out suddenly]. 'Twould be funny if our old sow could! But how can you be sure?

MAN [reprovingly] Just because I don't be havin' wisdom enough to understand a pig's talk I wouldn't be doubtin' its powers.

GIRL [considering the matter] Hiram isn't like that He doubts everything till he can prove it's so

MAN [pausing in his meal] Sure, an' it must be a very dull life he leads himself! Who might he be, now, colleen?

GIRL He's the Widow Boggs' son.

MAN An' it's a poor kind of a pa*ri* they must be makin' —not that I intend criticizing your relations after you treatin' me so pleasant

GIRL They're not my relations. [Hesitating and going on a bit self-consciously] Leastways, not yet, they ain't

MAN [regarding her curiously] Well, then, what would you be doing in their kitchen, and you no kin at all?

GIRL [explaining as she rolls out more cookies]. I've been the Widow Boggs' bound-girl for goin' on nine years. She took me from Cranberry Common when I was ten an' my folks died I've been workin' for her ever since to earn my board an' keep an' clothes

MAN [shrewdly]. I'm thinkin' the Widow Boggs is a woman to drive a sharp bargain, but what about this son of hers?

GIRL [shyly, pausing in her work] Hiram an' me are goin' to get married soon's the crops are all in

MAN Is that the truth, now? An' what sort of a man is he?

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

GIRL [*proudly, but with no great show of enthusiasm*] Oh, he's very steady an' dependable. I'm lucky, every one hinks—what with bein' only a bound-out girl an' havin' red hair into the bargain

[*Smoothing an escaping lock from her forehead*]

MAN Sure, an' 'tis great glory on your head, colleen Didn't you be knowin' that?

GIRL [*wonderingly*] No, mister, it's not considered that hereabouts But Hiram says he'll overlook it, seein' I'm broke to his ways, an' the Widow Boggs says maybe if I don't go runnin' out bareheaded in the sun, an' if I comb it night an' mornin' with an iron comb, maybe in time it'll darken to a decent shade

MAN God forbid! In the old country they do be callin' it a queen's colour My own grandmother had the same—God rest her soul! [*Crossing himself piously, then continuing with relish*] Many's the time I've heard her tell how 'twas held to be a sign of blessing from the Fairy Folk themselves, an' the redder it was the more power you would be havin' over them.

GIRL If I told that to Hiram an' the Widow they'd never believe me

MAN [*philosophically, taking another cookie*] Then it would be a waste o' good breath

GIRL [*sighing and cutting out more cookies*] Maybe it would be, mister

MAN [*curiously*] An' why would they be leavin' you to keep the house here by yourself?

GIRL [*in matter-of-fact tones*] Oh, they've gone to Mis' Sally Robbins' funeral a couple of miles down the road But I couldn't leave the bakin'

[*The MAN gives a dramatic start in his chair.*]

MAN [*solemnly*]. Is it the truth you're tellin' me, colleen?

GIRL [*surprised*] Why, yes, mister, they never like to miss a funeral

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MAN [*wagging his head wisely*]. I might have known it.
The third sign to-day!

GIRL [*curiously*]. What sign? *ansp' curios*

MAN [*impressively*] Did you never hear how the first person you'll be talking to on the road to a funeral is bound to be bringing you great good fortune?

GIRL [*shaking her head*]. No, an' I've been to funerals and funerals

MAN [*easily*] Then you were never meeting with the right person, surely [Continuing] An' maybe you'll be tellin' me what day o' the month it is, in case I might be wrong in my own calculations.

GIRL It's the thirteenth o' September I know it, 'count o' the funeral, an' because Hiram said we'd better be settin' our weddin'-day for a month from now

MAN [*wagging his head*] Then I made no mistake The thirteenth it is, an' that's my lucky day, colleen. My grannie read it in the stars, an' me a bit of a lad squattin' cross-legged before the peat fire in County Clare. "Michael O'Donovan Patrick Sweeney," says she, "there's luck for you in the thirteenth day of the month as long as there's breath in your body. Born on the thirteenth you were, an' wedded on the thirteenth you'll be" I was mindin' myself of her words this very mornin' as I took up my pack an' started off But that wasn't the only sign, for I hadn't so much as made the first turning when what should I see in a field but a great black cow. Stock-still she stood, starin' at me, an' not so much as one white hair from the horns of her head to her switchin' tail

GIRL That must have been Squire Sawyer's old black Betsy.

MAN It's rare good fortune to meet with an all-black cow, an' when it's the thirteenth day o' the month as well there's sure to be something more nor common in it.

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

GIRL I'm glad you told me I'll watch out from now on [She carries pan of cookies to the oven up C

MAN [watching her more and more approvingly]. You've a light foot, I see [pointing to it], an' a well-turned ankle. I'm thinkin' you can dance better nor most?

GIRL [pleased, but firm] We don't hold with dancin' much in these parts Folks think it's sinful, besides bein' a waste o' time an' shoc-leather

MAN [snorting], An' that's all they know about it, bad cess to the lot of them Did you never read in the Bible how King David himself danced before the Lord?

GIRL [doubtfully]. But that was a long time ago. Times has changed

MAN. I'm thinkin' the Lord God's not grown tired of a light foot an' a good bit of a tune [To her] Don't you be likin' to hear one yourself now?

GIRL I'm very fond of music [Confidingly] Hiram's promised me a melodeon, so's I can learn to play hymns on it this winter

MAN [scornfully] Hymns, is it? I'll teach you better nor that, colleen [Eagerly] Tunes, why my head's ringin' with them day an' night! I've only to pick them the same as you would be gatherin' berries off a bush There isn't a mood you'd be havin' on you but I could be findin' a tune to suit it An' what's a melodeon compared to a fiddle but the light a tallow candle would make, an' it gutterin' in the face of the moon?

GIRL [wistfully] Do you carry your fiddle in your pack, mister?

MAN [rising] Let you listen, an' I'll be playin' you the one they do be callin' The Londonderry Air [He goes to the doorstep, opens his pack, and returns with an old fiddle, which he begins to tune, talking as he tightens and plucks at the strings] You won't be hearing the like of it anywhere nowadays It's an old tune and a stolen tune,

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

for they say Blind Shemus Dougherty brought it back, an' he spendin' seven years along o' the Fairies in the burnin' hill. It's merry and sad and queer, an' there's magic in it, colleen, for them that have the heart to hear

GIRL [wonderingly] But don't folks hear with their ears, mister?

MAN [fitting the fiddle to his chin and drawing his stool away from the table] It's only them as listens with the heart that hears the true magic. An' a heart does be needin' music the same as the grass does be needin' rain

[He draws the bow across the strings and plays the haunting strains of "The Londonderry Air," now gay and quick, like an old reel, now low and minor and lingering. He sways to the rhythms as he plays, and his eyes never leave the GIRL's face as she stands spellbound before him, her two little floury hands clasped rapturously upon her calico chest. As the tune ends she draws a deep breath, and turns half-dazed, shining eyes to him.

GIRL [softly] Oh, mister, 'twas like everythin' in the world, an' more beside

MAN [approvingly] Then you listened with the heart, colleen. Every little note it did be fallin' upon it like a sweet rain

GIRL [still wondering] Yes, it watered my heart. I could feel it [Pressing her hands there] I knew what the music meant as long as you played, but now I can't remember. Only, nothin'll ever be the same again now I've heard it

MAN [putting down fiddle] You'll be knowin' I speak the truth when I tell you a fiddle's better nor a melodeon. Isn't it so, now? [Turning to her questioningly] I might be makin' so bold as to call you by name, if I could be knowin' of it?

GIRL [leaning on the table, staring out in front, still under the music's spell]. Martha Rose

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

MAN Sure, it's pretty an' suits you well, only I'd be turnin' it round about an' call you Rose Martha, if I had my way.

GIRL Hiram likes plain Martha best, so I'll be leaving out the Rose once we're married

MAN It's a pity—there's never enough roses in the world, not even in June

GIRL [suddenly rousing herself] Oh, mercy me, if I haven't gone an' let another pan o' cookies go up in smoke! [She runs to oven and takes them out guiltily] I never did burn two whole pans in all my life before!

MAN [watching her take them out] I'm thinkin' they're past hope, even for the likes o' my stomach!

GIRL [throwing the panful into fire] The Widow Boggs'd scold me for a week steady if she smelt 'em

[Opening the window, she returns to table and rolls out more

MAN [touching her hand as she rolls the dough] Let you be turnin' over your palm, an' I'll tell your fortune for you

[GIRL starts to do so, then draws back MAN begins coaxing her

Come, now, 'twon't cost you a penny, an' you needn't be afraid I can see it's a fine one you'll be having

GIRL [hesitating] 'Tisn't that, mister it's the Widow Boggs an' Hiram They don't believe in tellin' fortunes They say it's wicked an' bad as breakin' a commandment.

MAN An' who are they to be passin' judgment the same as the Lord God Himself?

GIRL [nervously] Oh, you hadn't ought to be so blasphemous

MAN Lord bless me, what do you want me to say?

GIRL You could just say, "Bless me"

MAN Well, bless me, then, give over your little floury paw

GIRL [doing so half fearfully] Can you see it all there, plain as in writin'?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MAN [*bending over it*] Plainer nor writin' it is, Rose Martha, an' there's a long life here an' a happy one, an' a marriage—[he darts her a quick look, which she is too absorbed to note] with a dark, thin sort of a man

GIRL [*softly to herself*]. That's queer! Hiram's short an' square, an' what hair he has is light.

MAN [*going on with renewed vigour*] But that's not the half of what I'm seeing There's travel here, an' the roads of all the world from white May to red October An' you walkin' of them with the dark man by your side, an' there's music, an' the dancin' of many feet—

GIRL [*nervously*]. But, mister, supposin' that—that I was to marry a fairish man

MAN [*stubbornly*] I see it written plain—you'll be mating with a dark man

GIRL. But how can it be when Hi—

MAN [*breaking in*] You can't be askin' a how and a why of Fate. Those were my grannie's very words to me, an' she tellin' me a strange fortune of a land across the sea, an' a girl with hair like little flames an' as many freckles as there are stars on the Milky Way.

GIRL [*startled*] Did she tell you that?

MAN She did, an' more beside "There'll be the sound of flowers in her name, lad," my old grannie said, "an' a plain bit of a thorny one too, so you'll be makin' no mistake" [watching the effect of this upon her and seeming pleased Suddenly he drops her hand, draws her to him, and kisses her full on the mouth]

GIRL [*faintly, as he lets her go*] Oh, mister, oh!

MAN [*watching her with shining eyes*] Look at me, bound-girl Have they kept you shut up in their four walls so long you can't be tellin' love when you're meetin' with it?

GIRL [*faltering*] I'm—frightened, mister

MAN. I wouldn't be harmin' a hair o' your head, an' every one a candle to light you to Paradise

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

GIRL 'Tain't you I'm scared of—it's me [In almost a whisper] I'm feelin' things that I hadn't ought to feel—not with me an' Hiram cried three times a'ready in meetin' [looking at him beseechingly, but with growing emotion]

MAN [catching her hands and speaking with sudden contrition] Listen to me well, colleen Maybe I didn't be tellin' you all I saw There's cold an' hunger written there too, for a road can be a lonesome dark place an' you a long way from any lighted door—an' maybe then they'll be shutting it in your face An' you not growing young with the years

GIRL [slowly] But everybody grows old some time, don't they, mister?

MAN [drawing her closer to him] I couldn't be denyin' that, an' I wouldn't be changing the road for the finest farm in your country or a grand house in Boston or Philadelphia

GIRL [hesitatingly] But supposin' you get hungry, mister?

MAN [significantly] An empty belly's a hard thing, but it's nothin' to a heart that never had its fill o' love

GIRL [still objecting, though nearly won over] An' there's winter comin' on

MAN [twinkling] Sure, an' I wouldn't be above takin' a hint or two from the birds an' beatin' my way south

GIRL [still hesitant] But birds are different, mister. they got wings

MAN [persuasively] We'll be following after the sun and the warm winds, Rose Martha, an' some day we'll be comin' to a village where the women have got kindly eyes an' the cattle are fat an' the barns do be full An' I'll turn my hand to tinkering again and fiddling for weddings and dances the winter through Sure, we'll be earnin' our food an' a warm bed in the hay o' nights —whisperin' together thoughts the like we wouldn't be havin' at all in your great four-poster beds

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

GIRL [fascinated, but still doubtful]. You're askin' me to leave a lot, mister. 'Tisn't every girl gets a chance like mine.

MAN [quickly]. 'Tisn't every girl I'm asking to go with me. [Wheedling] An' as to that, I'll be givin' you gifts too—fine gifts the sort every girl wouldn't be gettin' for her marriage. The four winds o' heaven, I'll be givin' you, an' twisty brown roads, an' the sight of hills an' green islands an' the wrinklin' old sea. You'll be gettin' the song o' birds an' the smell o' flowers an' music for the asking.

GIRL [drawing a deep breath] You do make it sound just beautiful, mister

MAN [eloquently]. Beautiful it is. It's not every day you'll be gettin' the whole earth offered to you. The Widow Boggs an' her son they'll be keepin' you a bound-girl all your days, but I'll be settin' you free.

GIRL [desperately] Oh, mister, I want to be goin' along o' you, only—

MAN [breaking in]. Well, then, what's to stop you? There's a parson in the next county will join our hands, an' I've a little ring in my pack would be just the fit o' your finger.

GIRL There's Hiram an'— [Stopping short suddenly at the sound of distant approaching wheels. She darts to the door, peers out, and returns to him all agitation] It's them. They're just comin' over the rise o' the hill I didn't look for 'em back so soon. They mustn't find you here, mister, there'd be a terrible to-do, an' maybe they'd have you locked up in gaol

MAN. An' maybe they wouldn't, colleen.

[The GIRL is dragging his pack in and pushing him towards other door, the one to the house

GIRL You can let yourself out the front way when you hear them drive in the barn.

MAN [gathering up his fiddle and pack]. Well, I'll go, for

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

I wouldn't want to be bringing trouble on you, bound-girl But I'll be back—after the fall o' the dark, when the crickets do be liftin' their wee voices against the cold

GIRL [standing at the door R and listening tensely] Yes, mister, only you've got to go now, they've passed the bridge

MAN [reaching door up L and turning to her]. Let yourself be choosin' between the two of us, an' if it's me you're taking listen for *The Londonderry Air* that I'll be playin' under the sign-post where the roads meet

GIRL [urging him into the other room] Oh, hurry, please hurry, mister! They're turnin' in the gate!

MAN [shouldering his pack and waving from the door] An' whichever one of us it is, here's my thanks for the cakes an' milk an' the fine conversation. [Exit up L

[As he goes the wheels sound very near The GIRL
hurriedly carries away his empty glass and pan
She returns to the table and begins to roll more
cookies vigorously as the lights fade out

[The CURTAIN falls to denote a lapse of time—some eight hours.

[It rises a moment later, showing the same kitchen about seven o'clock in the evening The fire glows pleasantly, candles are lighted on mantel and table, and the WIDOW BOGGS, a large, powerful old woman with grey hair, spectacles, and a stern expression, is kneading bread at the table Supper-dishes are piled at the sink From the room beyond come the none too harmonious strains of a wailing melodeon, being played by very uncertain hands The tune is scarcely recognizable in the frequent discords The WIDOW BOGGS calls out loudly in a harsh old voice as she thumps the last loaf into the pans.

WIDOW BOGGS If you don't leave that organ this minute an' come an' wash the supper-dishes I'll tell

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Hiram to take it right back where it come from! [Raising her voice] You hear me, Marthy?

[GIRL's voice from the other room as organ stops

GIRL. Yes, 'um.

WIDOW BOGGS [still grumbling] I'll never hear it without it puts me in mind of Mis' Robbins' funeral an' the trouble we had luggin' it home an' all

[The GIRL appears in the doorway, flushed and curiously shiny about the eyes. She is dressed as she was in the morning, but her whole bearing is different. She is all a-tingle with suppressed excitement HIRAM follows close behind her, a heavy, clumsy youth in waistcoat and shirt-sleeves. His hair is pale and his expression dull and stubborn. At present he is completely under his mother's thumb, but he will in time become a bully. 

GIRL I ain't forgot the dishes, Missis Boggs [quietly, as she moves towards the sink or table R].

WIDOW BOGGS [crossly]. 'Twouldn't be the first time you had.

HIRAM [lighting a corn-cob pipe] Oh, Ma, can't you leave her be? I wanted she should try playin' some more.

WIDOW BOGGS You must be either deaf or crazy, Hiram, an' I dunno but what one's bad as t'other

GIRL [apologetically] I can't seem to make it sound right nohow, but maybe when Miss Peters shows me where to put my fingers—

WIDOW BOGGS [setting bread-pans on hearth] There'll be no livin' in this house then, but o' course *my* feelin's ain't to be considered no more—not now you've got Hiram hooked, an' upset his mind so's he's willin' to pay out three pounds for Mis' Robbins' old organ. Another good churn an' spinnin'-wheel would be more sensible, I say.

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

HIRAM [crossly] Oh, Ma, I wish't you'd quit scoldin' about it.

WIDOW BOGGS [commandingly] You go out'n the shed and fetch in another armful o' kindlin' wood This fire's most out [HIRAM goes out, walking heavily The WIDOW BOGGS covers the bread-pans with ostentatious effort] There's the bread set—'twas risin' all over the pans while you two was in the parlour

GIRL I was amin' to do it soon's I had these cleared up

WIDOW BOGGS Always excuses—excuses It's the same day in, day out, an' what it'll be when you're married I don't know, I'm sure

GIRL [absently over the dishes] Yes, 'um

WIDOW BOGGS [eyeing her sharply] What's come over you to-day? You've acted queer an' had a dreadful guilty look ever since we come back from the funeral, an' what you did with your mornin' I don't know—only three pans o' cookies to show

[HIRAM returns with wood, cutting his mother short
He flings the wood down noisily, and stands
watching the GIRL dry the dishes.]

HIRAM Martha.

GIRL [looking at him hopefully] Yes, Hiram

HIRAM [peering at her curiously] You look kinda feverish to-night, but it becomes you. Your freckles don't show near so much.

GIRL You said you didn't mind 'bout my havin' so many

HIRAM [soberly] Well, an' so I don't. I told you I wouldn't let it make no difference in my feelin's I was just remarkin' on it, that's all.

GIRL [reflectively] There might be some folks would think they was a sign o' beauty.

HIRAM That's foolishness

GIRL [wistfully] I 'spose you couldn't exactly admire my looks, Hiram?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

HIRAM [*seating himself and speaking with heavy philosophy*]. 'Tisn't given to every woman to be beautiful.

GIRL [*with sudden spirit*]. An' 'tisn't given to every man to see beauty either!

HIRAM [*startled*]. You do act queer to-night, same's Mother said You feel all right, I expect?

GIRL [*eagerly*]. Oh, yes, Hiram, but 'sposin' I didn't?

HIRAM [*stolidly*]. Well, but you just said you did. You can't feel two different kinds o' ways to once't.

GIRL [*hanging up the towel*]. I can feel lots o' ways to once't.

HIRAM [*exasperated*]. Now, Marthy, don't you commence gettin' flighty just's you was soberin' down so good an' quiet

GIRL [*sighing and coming nearer*]. But I get tired always actin' the same, Hiram

HIRAM. You'll get over that. Just wait till we're married an' Mother lets me run things. You'll have all the cookin' an' sewin' an' housework to do an' the children to look after. You won't have no time for fancies.

GIRL [*looking about her a little nervously*]. No, I guess I won't. [Touching his arm hopefully] Hiram, you was startin' to tell me somethin' when you come in, only your ma was here

HIRAM [*putting his feet on bench, yawning*]. I kind of forget what 'twas.

GIRL [*hopefully, leaning against arm of his chair*]. 'Twasn't about love an'—an' us?

HIRAM [*stodgily*]. No, I know 'twasn't that.

GIRL [*urging him on*]. But you're sure you do love me, Hiram?

HIRAM [*with another great yawn*]. Didn't I tell you I did? Ain't once enough?

GIRL But I like you to tell me lots o' times.

HIRAM [*crossly, as he fights off sleep*]. Well, that ain't my way, an' you'd ought to know it by this time.

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

GIRL [*thoughtfully*]. It takes a lot o' love to make folks happy

HIRAM M'-m-m. [*He is almost asleep, but she bends down and kisses him He starts up*] Gorry, Marthy, I wish't you weren't always so sudden

GIRL Won't you kiss me back, Hiram?

HIRAM Well

[*He does so efficiently enough, but grudgingly The GIRL is unstirred by it, and continues to regard him with a puzzled air of indecision.*

GIRL I wish't you'd say somethin'.

HIRAM [*irritated*] Can't you leave off pesterin' me? [*GIRL drops back discouraged He settles deeper into his chair.*] Why don't you try another tune on the organ?

GIRL I guess I'd rather not.

HIRAM Ma won't scold no more

GIRL [*moving away to stand by the window*] 'Tisn't that it makes such a loud noise [*With a new note in her voice*] Did you ever hear a fiddle, Hiram?

HIRAM Huh! [*Going on with an injured air*] You're awful contrary after the trouble I took to get you an organ

GIRL I'm real grateful

HIRAM [*suddenly rousing himself*] I recollect it now—what I was goin' to tell you

GIRL [*returning to him with hopeful expression*] What was it, Hiram?

HIRAM 'Twas about my coat there. [*Pointing to one hanging from a peg down R*] I tore a regular barn-door in it on a nail in the Robbins' entry. I kep' my arm over it so's Ma didn't spy it, but I thought maybe you'd kinda draw it together for me now. I'll need it for church to-morrow

[*The light slips from the GIRL's face She goes over to the peg and takes down the coat, but there is a defiant set to her shoulders and a new firmness to her walk*

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

GIRL [*carrying it to the table*]. All right, Hiram, I'll mend it for you

[She takes up her work-basket and begins to sew quickly, with every now and then a look towards the dark window. HIRAM settles back comfortably with another enormous yawn. His eyes are shut. There is a pause, in which the crickets outside may be heard chirping loudly.

HIRAM [*sleepily*] I'll be glad when those pesky crickets let up their everlastin' hollerin' out there

GIRL [*with a reminiscent note in her voice*]. I like to hear 'em—singing against the cold

HIRAM. Wish 'twould come an' freeze every last one of 'em

GIRL [*quickly*]. No—no

[There is a hint of horror in her tones and in her eyes, as if she and the crickets were on a new and common footing

HIRAM [*still more drowsily*] You be sure an' fix it so's it won't show?

GIRL [*bending over the work*] I'll try to

HIRAM [*mumbling and nearly asleep*] An' you might see if the top button's on good an' strong.

GIRL [*absently*] All right.

[In another minute he is asleep. He does not snore, but his lumped body and heavy breathing tell plainly how it is with him. GIRL steals a long glance at him and speaks tentatively.

(To herself)

Hiram?

[He does not make any sign, and she sighs and turns to the sewing again. Presently she finishes and sits with the coat across her lap and her head turned towards the window in a listening attitude. But there is no sound but the crickets till the WIDOW BOGGS' voice calls sharply from the other room.

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

WIDOW BOGGS [from off up L] I expect you've gone and let Hiram fall asleep 'fore the fire again?

GIRL [still listening, answering absently] Yes, 'um

WIDOW BOGGS [voice raised in complaint] Well, it'll take the two of us to rouse him once he's started

GIRL He was dreadful sleepy, I couldn't help it.

WIDOW BOGGS. No, you never can You're the most helpless of any bound-out girl I ever did have.

GIRL [staring straight before her] Yes, 'um

[There is another brief pause, and then the music sounds faintly somewhere out in the darkness It is "The Londonderry Air," clear and compelling The GIRL is on her feet in an instant Swiftly she carries HIRAM's coat to its peg, taking her own long brown cloak down from its place and wrapping it about her She gives a little apprehensive look towards the other room and HIRAM, who continues his sleep unsuspectingly She moves noiselessly, as one in a happy daze ~~and~~ ~~and~~

WIDOW BOGGS [calling] D'you hear that noise?

GIRL [she has reached the door R and pauses there on the threshold tensely] Yes, 'um

WIDOW BOGGS Sounds like one o' them wanderin' pedlars or gipsies was round again

[GIRL's hands reach for the door-knob There is a slight sound

What you doin'?

GIRL [quietly, but with great scared eyes and hand to her wildly beating heart] Listenin'.

WIDOW BOGGS [continuing from without] Well, you might just step out an' make sure the barn's shut fast, long's there's prowlers about an' Hiram no good to us

GIRL [faintly] Yes, 'um

[She gives a quick look at the shadowy kitchen and the heavily lumped form of her betrothed. Then

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

she opens the door and slips determinedly over the doorstep.

WIDOW BOGGS [*voice still following her*]. You hear what I say, Marthy?

GIRL'S VOICE Yes, 'um.

[*There is a queer little triumphant ring to the words as they drift back from the darkness.*

CURTAIN

THE POISON PARTY

A BURLESQUE COMEDY

BY F. SLADEN-SMITH

CHARACTERS

THE QUEEN-MOTHER

A SERVANT

THE CARDINAL

THE KING

DENISE DE BEAUJOLIS

M. DE BEAUJOLIS

THE Unnamed Society of Manchester, with which Mr Sladen-Smith has been intimately associated for a number of years, may be regarded as representing the anti-Naturalistic movement of the modern stage. The demand for 'reality' in the theatre produced a crop of plays which failed to satisfy because they were apt to be artistically formless and æsthetically sordid, hence the later reaction in favour of the fantastic, the poetic, and the romantic-historical.

Mr Sladen-Smith's plays are the expression of a vigorous and colourful imagination and an unusual sense of humour. He escapes from the twentieth century into the world of medievalism or Orientalism, where bright ideas are so much more important than fidelity to detail. Like Lord Dunsany, whom he most resembles, he generally chooses the one-act form as the best medium for fantasy, though he attempted a more sustained flight in "Wonderful Zoo" with considerable success.

In addition to writing plays, Mr Sladen-Smith has done ambitious work as a producer, and *The Amateur Producer's Handbook*, which he wrote in 1933, is an admirable exposition of the fundamental principles derived from his own experience. He is certainly one of the most distinguished artists which the modern amateur revival has produced.

THE POISON PARTY¹

SCENE *A room in the royal palace*

Doors R and L and a big window C back There is a large table L C covered by a cloth of rich material, which drapes to the floor There is a chair above the table, and another one L of it A second table is R C this also has two chairs, above and below Armchair down R These are the essentials, but appropriate furniture can be added if desired

When the curtain rises the QUEEN-MOTHER is busy with a dish of cakes She very carefully pours some powder into some of them from a large ring

QUEEN-MOTHER [above table, finishing her task] Ah! Skilful, extremely skilful! No one in the family could possibly have done it better Well, destiny is always turning upon something, but this must be the first time it has turned upon a cheese-cake

[She strikes a bell on right end of table

[A SERVANT enters R

Send the Lord Prince Cardinal to me

[The SERVANT exits R

[The QUEEN-MOTHER strides down R, and back again to the table, looking at the ring Then she takes up the cakes and regards them intently
Toothsome morsels! [Putting down the cakes and moving round to above table] A pleasant feast, and then every problem solved And not unpleasant really A twinge, perhaps but nothing like toothache [Sitting in

¹ Applications concerning amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W C 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

chair above table] I wonder I never thought of this method before [The CARDINAL enters R

CARDINAL [pausing at the door] Your Majesty has need of me?

QUEEN-MOTHER I have. Great need. Shut the door and come forward. [She lifts up the dish of cakes] You see these cakes?

CARDINAL [C] I do. Your Majesty's favourite dish.

QUEEN-MOTHER. What do you think it means?

CARDINAL That your Majesty is hungry.

QUEEN-MOTHER It means that I have had enough.

CARDINAL. And left so many? Rather unusual, isn't it?

QUEEN-MOTHER I am speaking with a double meaning

CARDINAL Very fashionable at the moment, I believe.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Never mind about that. What do you deduce?

CARDINAL. The usual trouble

QUEEN-MOTHER. Yes, but in an aggravated form.

CARDINAL The King is incorrigible?

QUEEN-MOTHER Quite. What with his zoological specimens, his so-called domestic pets, his misplaced sense of humour, and his amazing amours, he is wearing ne to shreds and patches

CARDINAL [looking at her] I assure you, no one would guess it

QUEEN-MOTHER Who should know better than you hat beneath this possibly magnificent husk I am a weak, uring woman, crushed beneath the heavy burden of infirmity and statecraft

CARDINAL Anyway, you conceal it very well

QUEEN-MOTHER The Blood Royal does not show its secret sorrows to the vulgar multitude.

CARDINAL. The eye of brass, the cheek of porcelain

QUEEN-MOTHER Where did you pick that up?

CARDINAL. It's an Oriental metaphor

THE POISON PARTY

QUEEN-MOTHER I'm not sure I like it ' eye of brass ? What is your Eminence thinking about ?

CARDINAL [to distract her] Your troubles, madam, as always

QUEEN-MOTHER Ah, yes, my troubles. Well, there comes a time in every trouble when something must be done, and that swiftly I assure you I can rise to an occasion ; can face any difficulty

CARDINAL And every time you have done so the population has slightly decreased

QUEEN-MOTHER That never does any harm Now, astonishing as it may seem, these little cakes mean that I am about to rise to the occasion once more . but you are not astonished ?

CARDINAL I am, technically, your Majesty Actually, of course, a cardinal who was astonished would soon cease to be a cardinal

QUEEN-MOTHER There is something in that—but you must admit that these little cakes look innocent and appetizing

CARDINAL Your cook's famous cheese-cakes always look innocent and appetizing Happy is he who is permitted to taste them

QUEEN-MOTHER You think so ? Ha ! Ha !

CARDINAL Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

QUEEN-MOTHER You don't often see a joke so promptly

CARDINAL Well, I've got an inkling, you know. After all, it's not the first time your Majesty has prepared a little food, is it ?

QUEEN-MOTHER Ah, but this is a much more attractive design than usual For instance, you will observe that these cakes are laid out in a special manner

CARDINAL [moving to downstage R corner of table and observing the dish] So they are. Arranged in the form of a letter M.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

QUEEN-MOTHER My initial

CARDINAL Very pretty and tasteful

QUEEN-MOTHER. Each of these cakes contains a filling of lemon-cheese.

CARDINAL. Filling of lemon-cheese.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Each filling of lemon-cheese contains a small plum in the middle

CARDINAL. Plum in the middle

QUEEN-MOTHER. This echoing is undignified. Each plum, with the exception of the two at either end of the letter M, contains a deadly, potent poison.

CARDINAL [moving up to the window, rubbing his hands] Really, it's quite like old times, isn't it?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Do you know, I couldn't help feeling that when I began the work. But, having followed me so far, my lord, possibly you can follow me further

CARDINAL Well, well. ^{clearly} obviously those tarts are intended for some one

QUEEN-MOTHER [with heavy sarcasm]. This is brilliance indeed.

CARDINAL The question is: for whom are they intended?

QUEEN-MOTHER One of them is for you

CARDINAL [amazed] Oh, really! I say! Your Majesty!

QUEEN-MOTHER One of the untouched ones, of course. The other untouched one is for me. The rest are intended for the infamous Denise de Beaujolis and her disgusting father

CARDINAL The King's fancy has turned in that direction?

QUEEN-MOTHER [rising] I discovered it last week. Oh, it is too much! He is out of his senses. Denise de Beaujolis queening it over me, her old father prancing down these corridors. [Walking up and down] Too much! Do you realize, my lord, that within a month of

THE POISON PARTY

that woman attaining complete ascendancy over the King I should be requested to enter a nunnery? Could there be a greater misfortune?

CARDINAL There could not—for the nunnery, [“]

QUEEN-MOTHER Let the King have his dogs, his cats, his leopards, his private zoo, even the Duchess de Briancourt, if she amuses him, but once he stoops to the common people it is time for his poor mother to get busy

CARDINAL And your plan is—

QUEEN-MOTHER Utterly simple I have made inquiries, and discovered that Denise and her father take a walk each evening in the Garden of the Winged Cupid—[moving up to the window R of the CARDINAL] you can see it from here You will go to them presently, present my compliments, and say the Queen's cook has made a dish of the famous lemon-cheese tarts, and the Queen-mother herself bids them come and taste them with her Once here, you will, of course, offer the cakes to me, and then, in deference to the Church, I shall offer them to you Those will be the two untouched ones at the bottom of the letter, you understand After that, they can fall to in good earnest, and may they come with an excellent appetite [Laughing heartily, crossing to R of table, and picking up the cakes] You know, there is something distinctly humorous about it

[She regards the cakes

CARDINAL [moving to the R C] Humorous? It's excruciating! Ha! Ha! [Suddenly growing serious] Of course, there is no doubt that these two particular cakes are perfectly safe? It's not myself I'm thinking of, but the Church needs me, and—

QUEEN-MOTHER [putting the cakes down on the table again] The Church does not need you more than I do Rest assured, my lord, you are perfectly safe unless and until we reconsider your position

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

CARDINAL [*uncomfortably*] Oh, quite—yes—thank you very much indeed

QUEEN-MOTHER Now to work! No one can ever say I have shirked work, especially work of this kind! It is nearly five, you must go to the Garden of the Winged Cupid and carry out your mission. Bring them as soon as—

[*The door R. suddenly opens, and the KING enters.* Really, Charles, I told you not to come and see me this evening!]

KING [*crossing to the QUEEN-MOTHER*]. All the more reason why I should come and give you a surprise, darling. [*They kiss*] No one likes you to be left alone too much. It's not safe. Hullo, Cardinal! I wish I could wear clothes like you [*Moving to below table*] I say, what delicious cakes!

QUEEN-MOTHER Charles, leave those cakes alone!

KING. But I love 'em It's one of the few innocent tastes I've inherited from you

QUEEN-MOTHER You know perfectly well you've inherited nothing from me, more's the pity You're exactly like your poor father

KING Extraordinary man, my poor father, but at least he was fond of animals, just as I am By the way, what did he die of?

QUEEN-MOTHER [*turning away*] You're always asking silly questions!

KING. I notice that one always annoys you So glad [*He moves to L. of table.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER Glad? It's nothing to be glad about—annoying your poor old mother

KING [*sitting*] Good heavens! Why this pathetic touch? What's in the wind?

CARDINAL [*interposing*] Her Majesty is a little tired with affairs of State. Would it not be better to retire and leave her alone with her own sad thoughts?

THE POISON PARTY

KING Not at all I'm tired and also hungry, and as for thoughts, there's nothing like food for the dumps.

[*He stretches out his hands to the cakes.*

QUEEN-MOTHER Charles, leave those cakes alone !

CARDINAL [*to the KING*] Your Majesty, I am sure there are plenty more in the palace

QUEEN-MOTHER Of course there are I know the cook made two dozen when she made these Besides, you've no need to be hungry Your pockets are bulging with food as it is

KING They're not !

QUEEN-MOTHER Well, what is in them, then ?

KING Why do you want to know ?

QUEEN-MOTHER [*coming to below table*] Charles, it is understood you have no secrets from me

KING Oh, haven't I ? You ask the Duchess de Briancourt

QUEEN-MOTHER Don't be vulgar What is in those pockets ?

KING Only animals ,

QUEEN-MOTHER Animals ? What kind of animals ?

KING Well, this one [*slapping right-hand pocket*] contains a baby hedgehog, but it's dead

QUEEN-MOTHER Disgusting !

KING Not at all At least it died naturally, which is more than your circle seem to manage

QUEEN-MOTHER [*moving up to the window*] Charles !

CARDINAL [*tactfully*] And the other pocket, your Majesty ?

KING There's a rabbit in that It's alive

QUEEN-MOTHER [*coming back to the table again*] Alive ? Good gracious ! Who ever heard of a king walking about with a live rabbit in his pocket ?

KING [*pulling rabbit out of his pocket*] Well, that's just what a king has done And it's a very nice rabbit It's going to sleep with me to-night

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

QUEEN-MOTHER. It is *not*!

KING It is!

QUEEN-MOTHER. I say no

[Somewhere a large clock strikes five.
Go, my Lord Cardinal, on your errand of State. I will deal with this tiresome boy. work

[The CARDINAL bows and exits R.

KING Where's that old boy off to? rude

QUEEN-MOTHER You're not to ask impertinent questions. And you are certainly not having a rabbit to sleep with you to-night. The idea is absurd and irreverent. unlucky

KING Why is it irreverent?

QUEEN-MOTHER I don't know why, but it obviously is [She walks up to the window]. Take that rabbit out of your pocket, and I will give it to a servant to be destroyed.

KING. Certainly not! Why on earth should it be destroyed? It might easily be most useful irony

QUEEN-MOTHER [looking eagerly out of window]. Nonsense! How can a rabbit be useful?

KING You never know. Anyway, it shall not be destroyed

QUEEN-MOTHER I say it shall Ah, there they are!

KING [rising] Who?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Will you cease asking questions? Ring the bell for the servant to take away your rabbit

KING. No! No!

[He slips over to the door R, opens it softly, and tips out the rabbit.

QUEEN-MOTHER I say, yes, yes!

KING [crossing back to the table] And I say, tut, tut! [Observing the dish of cakes] Why are these cakes arranged in a letter M? [He picks up the dish

QUEEN-MOTHER Compliment to me, of course. What a time that Cardinal is!

THE POISON PARTY

KING [sitting on the table and taking a cake from the bottom of the M] The legs of the M are too long.

[He gulps the cake

QUEEN-MOTHER Nonsense!

KING [taking a cake from the other side] They are, by two cakes

[He gulps the second cake, and puts the dish down, then jumps from the table and moves down L]

QUEEN-MOTHER [bearing this] Charles, leave those cakes alone and give me the rabbit

[She comes from the window and rings the bell
[The SERVANT enters R.

SERVANT Yes, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER The King has a rabbit that he—

KING No, he hasn't

QUEEN-MOTHER What do you mean?

KING [showing his empty pocket] Well, I ask you, has he? And now the man has come I'll have all those cakes He can easily bring some more.

[He is about to take them

QUEEN-MOTHER Charles! Leave those— [To the SERVANT] Take them away at once and watch over them [She hands the dish to the SERVANT, who exits R. You silly boy, you will drive me distracted! *mad*

KING [crossing to the chair down R and sitting on the up-stage arm] You're a beastly spoil-sport! Who are those cakes for?

QUEEN-MOTHER Where is that rabbit?

KING Shan't tell you unless you tell me who the cakes are for

QUEEN-MOTHER They're for the Lord Prince Cardinal and myself to make merry on

KING When you and the Cardinal make merry wise men run for their lives

QUEEN-MOTHER No doubt, but I've answered your question Where is that rabbit?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

KING. I put it outside when you weren't looking.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Do you mean to say it's lopping about the corridors now? Good heavens, how unseemly in a royal palace

[She rings the bell.]

[The SERVANT enters R.]

Have you seen the rabbit?

SERVANT [astonished] The rabbit, your Majesty? *f-u-*

QUEEN-MOTHER Yes, the rabbit, you silly loon!

Have you seen the rabbit out there?

SERVANT. The rabbit, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Oh, why are we afflicted with the lower classes? Have you seen the King's rabbit?

SERVANT. Does your Majesty mean the Duchess de Briancourt? [The KING laughs heartily]

QUEEN-MOTHER. No, of course not! There's nothing to laugh at, Charles. The King has lost a rabbit in the corridor outside. Is that clear?

KING [rising] A fat brown one with an extraordinary appetite. Is that clear?

SERVANT Yes, I think so, your Majesties

KING } [together]. Have you seen it?

QUEEN-MOTHER } SERVANT. No, your Majesties. I have seen no rabbit as yet.

QUEEN-MOTHER Well, why didn't you say so before?

SERVANT I was too astonished, your Majesty.

QUEEN-MOTHER You've no business to be astonished

KING Don't be silly, every one is astonished by rabbits

QUEEN-MOTHER Why?

KING I don't know, but they always are. You were yourself.

QUEEN-MOTHER [going to window up C] Anyway, it doesn't matter very much

KING But of course it does. I love my animals. I'm sorry I let this one go, but it seemed the only way

THE POISON PARTY

if saving it And unless you give orders for this man
to find it I'm going to remain here all night

[He sits in the chair down R

QUEEN-MOTHER [after a glance out of the window] As a
matter of fact, it is urgently necessary for you to go at once

KING No!

QUEEN-MOTHER Charles!

KING No! Not until you find my rabbit

QUEEN-MOTHER [to SERVANT]. The King will go with
you and search for the rabbit

SERVANT And leave the cakes outside, your Majesty?

KING Ah, yes, those cakes!

QUEEN-MOTHER [moving to R C, clasping her hands]
Good heavens, yes! The cakes! [To SERVANT] Go
back and guard them at once [The SERVANT exits R

KING While I remain here

QUEEN-MOTHER You idiotic boy! I have never been
so contradicted in one day before You must go and
find your stupid rabbit by yourself Goodness knows
where it may have wandered by now, and we have
enough scandals in the Court already And, remember,
the Queen-mother is mistress of this palace and of all
within it [She points majestically to the small door L.

KING The rabbit didn't go that way

QUEEN-MOTHER [taking the KING by the ear and leading
him across L] No, but the King will Work your
way round to the other door gradually, and heaven
grant you meet the rabbit on your journey!

[She turns to meet her visitors The KING un-
willingly opens the door, then, seeing his mother
is not noticing, shuts it and, running back, hides
under the table The SERVANT shows in
DENISE DE BEAUJOLIS, her father, and the
CARDINAL, then exits R again

[C] Ah, my Lord Cardinal, you have returned, and
with your company Welcome, Denise and Monsieur

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

de Beaujolis, welcome! It is more than time you graced our apartment.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS [*in a shrill, piping voice*]. Honoured, your Majesty, honoured, I'm sure As I was saying to the Cardinal as we came along, though we're by no means unused to select society and I hope we know how to behave, my girl and I, still, it makes you jump to be summoned bang into the palace, all in a jiffy, so to speak, and before—

DENISE Be quiet, Father Your Majesty, we're just overwhelmed I never thought you'd play the handsome like this

QUEEN-MOTHER It is a pleasure I've long promised myself Come, be seated

[*The QUEEN-MOTHER sits above the large table L*

DENISE and M DE BEAUJOLIS sit at the small table R, DENISE up stage

Seldom does a poor Queen have time to rejoice and make merry, but my Lord Cardinal, finding us in sombre mood, thought your sweet grace and winning ways—of which we have heard much—might somewhat cheer us.

CARDINAL [*bowing to the guests*] Beauty and wisdom are ever the solace of royalty

[*He sits in the chair below the door R.*

M DE BEAUJOLIS As I was saying as we came along, my girl can beat the noblest lady in the land when it comes to looks, while as for wisdom, I can tell you, my lord, if you'd been in some of the tight corners I've been in you'd have shivered in your scarlet shoes You know, your Majesty, women have always played the very devil with me, they're so damned—

DENISE Now, Father! Your Majesty, what an apartment! Just fancy living here! I must say I like a bit of taste Charles always says you do yourself well

QUEEN-MOTHER Does he indeed? Very good of him, I'm sure. You see somewhat of my son?

THE POISON PARTY

DENISE Somewhat? Hullo, that's good! Charles and I are—well, the best of friends, you know

M DE BEAUJOLIS That's the way to put it Tactful, tactful And as your Majesty well knows, one can't be too tactful, because women are so damned—

DENISE Be quiet, Father! You know, your Majesty, I first met the King during a dog-fight in the palace gardens He came upon it quite unofficially, you know, and tried to separate them Oh, how I laughed! I was all doubled up, and the King, seeing that, of course, sent away his gentlemen, and—well, that was the beginning of a great many things.

QUEEN-MOTHER Sweet child I'm sure it must have been We also must be good friends, you and I

M DE BEAUJOLIS There! What did I say? I knew the Queen would take to her at once, they're so much alike Not that we were really uneasy, your Majesty, because we feel we know you very well already, as Charles always gives us the latest tit-bits from the palace, and we laugh fit to kill ourselves when we hear of the Cardinal and all those *damned*—

CARDINAL Some other time, Monsieur de Beaujolis, I beg!

QUEEN-MOTHER It is all very interesting, but you must be tired and need refreshment Possibly you have heard of my cook's lemon-cheese cakes?

DENISE Haven't we just! The King is always licking his lips over them

M DE BEAUJOLIS They rejuvenate the mouth, invigorate the stomach, and impart the spices of Araby to the breath

QUEEN-MOTHER How well you put it! My cook has just made a fresh batch, you must taste them without delay

[She rises and strikes the bell

[The SERVANT enters R.

Bring in the cakes

[The SERVANT exits R.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

M. DE BEAUJOLIS [*digging DENISE in the ribs*]. We are getting on well, aren't we?

DENISE We should do if you'd behave better

[*The SERVANT enters R. with the cakes, crosses, and lays them on the table before the QUEEN-MOTHER.*

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. Go on! Behave yourself!

DENISE. Don't be silly. Once a lady always a lady

[*She slaps him*

[*Meanwhile the SERVANT has retired, and he now brings in the wine. He places two goblets on the large table L, and two on the small table R.*

QUEEN-MOTHER [*crossing to DENISE and stroking her head*] Pretty creature! Your playful ways delight my heart I can see that Charles has excellent taste.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. Taste? The King never makes a mistake when it comes to women Just like his father! I always remember the old King saying—in public too, mark you—that the damnedest—

[*The CARDINAL rises.*

CARDINAL. Will not your Majesty commence the feast?

QUEEN-MOTHER [*crossing back to her seat above the table R. and sitting*] With pleasure, my Lord Cardinal Come, let us be madly gay! [*She throws herself back and laughs a hollow laugh*] Ha! Ha!

CARDINAL [*echoing*]. Ha! Ha!

M. DE BEAUJOLIS [*laughing lustily*]. He! He! He! I do like a bit of fun, I do!

QUEEN-MOTHER I hope you get it [*To DENISE, lifting the dish of cakes*] Do you observe how prettily these cakes are arranged?

DENISE. The letter M, upon my word!

CARDINAL. The Queen's initial A compliment of the cook.

DENISE. Well, they do things in style here, I must say.

THE POISON PARTY

I wish poor old Charles could see me eating cakes with you, he'd never believe his eyes

QUEEN-MOTHER I trust the King is occupied elsewhere Come, my lord, will you serve us?

CARDINAL [crossing to L of QUEEN-MOTHER] Most willingly, madam [He hands the dish of cakes to her

QUEEN-MOTHER [taking a cake and handing the dish back to him] Let no monarch forget to reverence the Church

CARDINAL [bowing and taking a cake] Madam, the Church is deeply honoured

QUEEN-MOTHER [rising and taking the dish to the DE BEAUJOLIS] Now, pray help yourselves and help again, for they are as nourishing as they are delicious.

CARDINAL [lifting a goblet from the table] A toast! To the great Queen-mother! Success to her plans and destruction to her enemies!

THE DE BEAUJOLIS [getting up, raising their goblets, and drinking] The great Queen-mother! Success to her plans and destruction to her enemies!

[They sit down again

[The CARDINAL sits in the chair L of the table

QUEEN-MOTHER [to DENISE] How are you feeling?

DENISE [a little astonished] Perfectly well, I thank you, your Majesty

QUEEN-MOTHER Have one more, I beg of you [Moving round to behind M DE BEAUJOLIS] You are still in perfect health, I suppose?

M DE BEAUJOLIS Never better in my life, your Majesty

QUEEN-MOTHER [handing him the dish] You must really have another [He takes one There is a slight pause [C, observing him] Wonderful!

M DE BEAUJOLIS What is wonderful, if I may ask, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER Your constitutions. *They sit at the table*

M DE BEAUJOLIS Oh, we're a tough family, I can

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

tell you And it's a good job I am tough, because, as the Cardinal very well knows, women are so—

QUEEN-MOTHER And you, child, are perfectly marvellous Is it fresh air or natural resistance? ^{power}

DENISE What on earth do you mean, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER I think I can safely tell you—indeed, I suppose you have every right to know—that if your constitutions had any sense of decency you ought to be dying by now.

THE DE BEAUJOLIS [rising] Ought to be dying by now?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Certainly, and the fact that you're not ^{is} the finest example of lower-class tenacity ^{Si liborose} I have ever seen

DENISE [howling] Oh! Oh! Caught like rats! Just like rats! [To M. DE BEAUJOLIS] You old imbecile! ^{idiot} You ought to have known!

QUEEN-MOTHER Of course he ought, but old imbeciles never do Why are you so astonished? Do you suppose I would let this disgraceful affair between you and Charles continue? You may lay traps for my idiotic son, but I can lay traps as well, and with the assistance of my good cardinal will soon rid the country of a couple of pests.

DENISE. I can't believe it! I won't believe it!

M DE BEAUJOLIS Oh, it can't possibly be true!

QUEEN-MOTHER Since they find it so difficult to believe you'd better explain, my lord ^{blame}

CARDINAL [rising, affably] Like all great projects, it is beautifully simple The Queen-mother, with her accustomed skill, poisoned all the tarts of the letter M with the exception of the two at the bottom, which—

KING [suddenly rising between them from under the table] — which I ate when Mother wasn't looking!

[A terrible pause.]

QUEEN-MOTHER [recovering] Charles, where did you come from?

THE POISON PARTY

KING Under the table, and it's true what I said about the tarts

QUEEN-MOTHER. But when did you eat them ?

KING. When you were looking out of the window

CARDINAL. But those two were intended for the Queen-mother and myself

KING Precisely Well, you took the two next [To the QUEEN-MOTHER] I told you the legs of the M were too long

CARDINAL But, good heavens, that means that we're all—

ALL Poisoned !

M DE BEAUJOLIS It's a have, that's what it is, a beastly have !

DENISE Poisoned ! After all my pains to catch the King ! After all the planning and plotting ! Oh, it can't be true ! [Crossing to the KING] Have I put up with your silly jokes and tiresome animals, wasted my money on complexion doctors, and dressed far above my means for it all to be spoilt by a horrible old cat who has already poisoned half Europe, including her husband !

M DE BEAUJOLIS I must say Denise is right Why, I could have spent years peacefully thieving like my father before me if I hadn't tried to get this worthless chit fixed up in the palace It's a shame, that's what it is, a beastly shame ! A clever man like myself all done to nothing because a king has slobbered over a hussy !

CARDINAL [crossing to above table R] I must say this is a shock A shock ! I can scarcely realize it It ought not to have happened, at least, not to a prince of the Church, and I don't mind saying I was ill prepared, very ill prepared indeed I may have looked the part, and, of course, I was very careful not to take too many vows and all that kind of nonsense, still, you know, there were all manner of little things not exactly in tone, perhaps, and I don't mind saying it now There's been

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

quite a lot of going on in my life, really. Why, only yesterday—

QUEEN-MOTHER. My Lord Cardinal, you have no need to enliven our last moments by boasting. It does not surprise me to hear that your past is the colour of your robe, or that the woman is heartless, or the father a thief, but the appalling foolishness of my preposterous son has never ceased to amaze me, and I shall die in a state of stupefied astonishment at his never-ending idiocy

KING [*going to the QUEEN-MOTHER up C*]. What's the good of cursing me? I'm as astonished as anybody

M. DE BEAUJOLIS [*to DENISE*]. To think of all the trouble I took to pass you off as my daughter!

KING. Oh, then, she isn't your daughter?

M. DE BEAUJOLIS What do you think? I picked her up in the gutter.

DENISE [*to the KING*]. To think of all the trouble I took to make you think I adored you!

KING. Oh, then, you don't adore me?

DENISE How could I? [*Turning down L*] A fool like you!

KING Well, this is a pretty end to an idyllic love-affair.

CARDINAL A pretty end to years of triumphant compromise!

M. DE BEAUJOLIS —of comfortable knavery!

DENISE. —of delicious amours!

QUEEN-MOTHER Silence! —It has happened, and through an idiot. All my life I have noticed that there is an idiot at the bottom of every important event. But at least we know each other fairly well by now, so, while our constitutions still resist the drug, let us shake hands and prepare for a swift journey

CARDINAL Nevertheless, I think I ought to say that I've been rather—

QUEEN-MOTHER Cardinal, you are incorrigible!

[They begin to shake hands

THE POISON PARTY

• KING [crossing to down R, taking out a handkerchief, and sitting] Used as I am to Court life, this is beginning to affect me

[The QUEEN-MOTHER has shaken hands with the CARDINAL and M. DE BEAUJOLIS, and is just approaching DENISE when a great bang is heard.
All jump

M DE BEAUJOLIS Now does that mean we've reached heaven or the other place? [The SERVANT rushes in
SERVANT [falling on his knees]. Oh, your Majesty, the King's rabbit!

QUEEN-MOTHER [folding her arms and staring nobly into space] Fool, we have passed beyond a king's rabbit!

CARDINAL } [folding their arms and staring into space] Passed beyond a king's
DENISE } rabbit
M DE BEAUJOLIS }

SERVANT But, your Majesty, a great calamity has happened!

QUEEN-MOTHER [as before] Calamities mean nothing to us now

CARDINAL
DENISE } [as before] Nothing to us now
M DE BEAUJOLIS }

SERVANT. But the King will be furious!

QUEEN-MOTHER [as before]. A king's fury is beneath us

CARDINAL
DENISE } [as before] Quite beneath us
M DE BEAUJOLIS }

KING [rising, going to SERVANT, and shaking him]. Fool! What has happened?

SERVANT Sire, your rabbit has exploded. It ate up the cheese-cakes!

QUEEN-MOTHER
CARDINAL
DENISE } [coming out of their trance] The
M DE BEAUJOLIS cheese-cakes?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

SERVANT. Oh, pardon, your Majesties ! When I returned to the cakes after your Majesty had called me I found the rabbit eating the last one, and in consequence it has gone and exploded The cook will take it as a personal insult

QUEEN-MOTHER [*stepping down C*]. But you brought the cakes back here !

SERVANT I flew to get some more from the cook, and we arranged them as before. We thought all would be well

QUEEN-MOTHER [*looking at the others*] All would be well !

KING. I told you that rabbit would be useful So glad !

QUICK CURTAIN

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE

A COMEDY

BY ASHLEY DUKES

CHARACTERS

- ✓ ALDERMAN JOHN GROAT, a City haberdasher
- ✓ MISTRESS ANN GROAT, his young wife
- ✓ MASTER QUILL, an attorney attc
- ✓ MASTER JULER, a physician
- ✓ MASTER SUNDER, a surgeon
- ✓ MASTER OUNCE, an apothecary
- A MANSERVANT
- ← A WAITING-WOMAN

The SHOWMAN is played by MASTER SUNDER.

The scene is the alderman's house in Cheapside, London, in the Middle Ages. The costumes should be of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. A curtained scene with two openings may be used if desired. Playing-time, 1½ hours

THERE are dramatic critics who can analyse other people's plays, but lack the constructive imagination and craftsmanship necessary for creating plays of their own Mr Ashley Dukes belongs to the other class of critics who can achieve as successfully as they can appraise He was a dramatic critic for various papers both before and after the War, he has written four or five excellent volumes like Modern Dramatists and The Youngest Drama, he has translated or adapted plays from the German and French—"The Machine Wreckers," "Elizabeth of England," "No Man's Land," and "Mozart," for example, and he has written original plays like "The Fountain Head" and "The Man with a Load of Mischief," the latter of which earned for the author a great popular success "The Dumb Wife of Cheapside" ^{is a brilliant dramatization of an} ~~is a great story~~ ^{amusing story from Rabelais}

Mr Dukes opened the Mercury Theatre in 1933, where he has consistently produced a number of ballets and new plays, one of the first being Mr T S Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral" He was appointed Professor of Drama of the Royal Society of Literature in 1937, and since the end of the last war he has been Entertainment Adviser to the Control Commission in Germany

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE¹

A SHOWMAN dressed in the cap and robe of a medieval doctor comes before the curtain and beats his drum, as though to gather sightseers at a fair.

SHOWMAN Good masters and mistresses, (come into our playhouse,) and you shall see us act, for our profit and your pleasure, a most moral comedy called *The Dumb Wife of Cheapside* Nay, it is a most ancient comedy—too, having been acted above fifty thousand times since the beginning of the world, and written down a score of times—at least and such comedies, like wines and cheeses, are the better for their age Our tale is drawn from Master Francis Rabelais, his *Pantagruel*, chapter the thirty-fourth, where you may read it if you will, but we being players would have you see it instead

[*He beats his drum*]

Here in my hand is a bill of the characters, which I will read, and that is all you shall know of the comedy until we take your pence They are Alderman John Groat, a haberdasher of Cheapside, and Mistress Ann Groat, his newly wedded wife, and Master Quill, his attorney, and Master Julep, a learned physician, and Master Sunder, a surgeon—nay, a very skilful surgeon, since I shall presently play him myself, and Master Ounce, a most precise apothecary, and servants in the Alderman's house, which is our scene (And further we

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warrant and certify these characters to be imaginary, like the matter of the play, so let no person so-named proceed against us for slander under peril of being called a greater fool than our alderman.) And now to begin, good mistresses and masters!

[He withdraws behind the curtain, which presently opens. The scene is the hall of the Alderman's house. To the actor's R., in the background, is the entrance from the street, and to the L. a door leading to the living-rooms. The only furniture consists of an oaken table, around which are placed three chairs. On the table C. are a flask of wine and pewter cups, and to L. of them an inkhorn. Beneath the table a stool. The scene is empty when the curtain rises. A knock is heard at the street-door. A MANSERVANT enters L., crosses over, and opens it, admitting MASTER QUILL, who pauses for an instant on the threshold, and then enters briskly. gr.

MASTER QUILL [coming R.C.] Your master is awaiting me

MANSERVANT [at door R.] Sir, whom shall I announce to his Worship?

MASTER QUILL [with dignity] Young man, you have not been long in his service, or you would know that I am Master Quill, his attorney, of Lincoln's Inn Fields

MANSERVANT. I ask pardon, sir [Crosses to L.C.] His Worship shall know that you are here

MASTER QUILL [recalling him with a gesture] Stay. Is your mistress at home?

MANSERVANT She is gone with her waiting-woman to the cloth fair on Smithfield.

MASTER QUILL True, it is the feast of Saint Bartholomew. And has your mistress—is your mistress—It is no matter, young man, you may go.

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MANSERVANT My master will be with your Honour directly [Exit L.]

MASTER QUILL [alone, R C] Now, what can the Alderman want with me? I was amazed to hear of his wedding A snug haberdasher of Cheapside, turned forty, away he goes for a jaunt in Surrey, and returns home married, if you please! Married without so much as a 'By your leave' to his attorney! I vow no good can come of it. [He comes to the table, sniffs at the flask of wine, and seats himself R of table] She has a pretty face, doubtless—but no money, from all I hear That is bad Money should marry money! 'tis a law-of-life. And she is young, they say That is none too good forty should marry thirty, to my thinking I fear for honest John Groat

[Enter the ALDERMAN L. QUILL rises

Ahem! Good morning to your Worship

ALDERMAN [as though preoccupied] Ah, it is you, Master Quill? Pray be seated [MASTER QUILL sits R of table]

MASTER QUILL I trust your Worship is well?

ALDERMAN My health could not be better, Master Quill [He seats himself L. of table] No doubt you have heard of my marriage?

MASTER QUILL The news reached me but yesterday, so that I am one of the first to wish you joy

ALDERMAN I thank you, Master Quill, I thank you Now you will guess that I wish to make a settlement upon my bride

MASTER QUILL [taking out his writing-tablet] I shall be happy to receive your Worship's commands To such a man as you, Master Groat, I need not counsel prudence, wisdom

ALDERMAN I wish to settle upon my wife, Ann Groat, the whole of the property I now possess

MASTER QUILL The whole of your property! But, my good sir, that is a will and not a marriage-gift!

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ALDERMAN. It is *my* will

[MASTER QUILL makes a gesture of protest.

Nay, you need not try to dissuade me I know my mind, Master Quill

MASTER QUILL. You are a man in the prime of life, with a thriving trade that may need money for its growth. Pray reflect before entrusting your fortune to a woman's hands, however dear she may be to you. Consider too the effect upon your wife's good name The City matrons will certainly be envious They will say she has talked you into an act of folly)

ALDERMAN. Ah, would that were possible ! Master Quill, I must tell you that my wife is dumb

MASTER QUILL [rising, in astonishment]. Your wife is dumb ?

ALDERMAN. Unhappily she has been dumb from her birth

MASTER QUILL Do I hear you aright ?

ALDERMAN. Alas, it is too true !

MASTER QUILL. But how, then, could you marry her ?

ALDERMAN She was able to signify her assent.

MASTER QUILL By what means ?

ALDERMAN She embraced me warmly, even before my declaration was ended

MASTER QUILL [sits as before]. Then it appears she is not deaf ?

ALDERMAN Her hearing is good enough nay, it is better than yours or mine This morning I had no sooner remarked that it was a fine day and the feast of Saint Bartholomew than she took the purse from my hand and ran with her waiting-woman to the fair on Smithfield

MASTER QUILL And this is the wife to whom you would make over your fortune !

ALDERMAN. I love her, Master Quill, and I wis h to

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give her proof of my trust! Poor child, I know she will not easily hold her own among the gossips of Cheap-side. They shall have reason to envy my treasure!

MASTER QUILL I am amazed by such rashness

ALDERMAN Wait, Master Quill I have another reason for this marriage-gift, and one that you may think more prudent.

MASTER QUILL Indeed, I hope so

ALDERMAN Let me be sure we are not overheard [He rises, goes to the door L, listens, and returns to L of table] I hear it rumoured, Master Quill, that a new tax is shortly to be levied upon heads of families, according to their means Is not that sheer robbery of bread-winners and thrifty citizens like myself?

MASTER QUILL We none of us like taxation, Master Groat, and yet we must endure it

ALDERMAN Nay, hear me out [He sits L of table] I settle all I possess upon my wife, who will be dumb to the Treasury's questionings As for myself, I am as good as penniless, let them tax me as they please. Now what do you say to my plan?

MASTER QUILL You have missed your calling, Master Groat, you should have been a lawyer and not a haberdasher But what if your wife should prove a spendthrift?

ALDERMAN My goods are what women chiefly run to buy In my warehouse are silks and ribbons enough to bedeck all the dumb ladies in Christendom If my wife should spend too freely the money will come over my own counter

MASTER QUILL Nay, I foresee that you may even grow rich again, thanks to this handsome provision you are making for her [He rises] Yes, I will draw up the deed of settlement you wish, ^{sqn't down the set}

ALDERMAN Very good, Master Quill [He rises, goes behind the table, and pours out wine] Now, pray take a cup

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of wine with me, and let us speak as friends. You must not think me indifferent to my wife's affliction. I confess that it troubles me deeply.

MASTER QUILL [*taking the cup of wine that is handed to him*] It is true a dumb wife must be poor company for a man of spirit like yourself.

ALDERMAN There are times when I can scarcely bear to look into her eyes [*He returns to L of table, and motions QUILL to be seated on the R, as before.*] She would speak if she could, Master Quill!

MASTER QUILL I am sure of it.

ALDERMAN Nay, she would utter the prettiest, the tenderest, the most loving, of thoughts!

MASTER QUILL Hum! Of that one can never be so sure.

ALDERMAN Do you doubt my word?

MASTER QUILL I see that you are a newly wedded husband, Master Groat, and I drink your very good health [*He raises his cup, and they drink to each other.*] But if you know her so well, why should her dumbness distress you so deeply?

ALDERMAN [*setting down his cup*] I long to hear of her happiness from her own lips. Nay, I will tell you that to fondle a dumb wife is no joy at all, such is the pain of longing for her speech.

MASTER QUILL These are strange fancies. You should remember that the oracles of the ancients were mostly dumb, and that was their virtue.

ALDERMAN I am a plain man, Master Quill, and I know that her dumbness stands between us. Only yesterday, as we walked in Cheapside, an impudent apprentice looked into her face and smiled. Could she tell me of her loathing for that fellow's base effrontery? No, Master Quill! I held her closer and hurried her homeward, while she looked upon me with so pitiful a gaze that my eyes filled with tears. Ah, Master Quill,

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I am the happiest of men in possessing such a treasure,
and the wretchedest in being parted from her by this
misfortune !

MASTER QUILL Since we speak as friends, Master Groat, let me tell you that you are a man of sense in trade, but a simpleton in having married a dumb wife. Yet as one husband to another, I grant that your state has some advantages [Rising and coming C] Now I will take my leave, since to-day I shall be unable to pay my respects to Mistress Groat.

ALDERMAN [rising] Pray do not go, Master Quill ! She may return at any moment I hear her step already. She is here, Master Quill, she is here ! [He crosses R] Let me but open the door !

MASTER QUILL [crossing over L, and shaking his head] Ah, Master Groat, I said that you were a newly wedded husband !

[The ALDERMAN, opening the door R, reveals the young and beautiful ANN standing on the threshold. She enters, followed by her WAITING-WOMAN, who carries her fairings. The WAITING-WOMAN comes down stage R, while ANN advances slowly to the C, regarding MASTER QUILL.]

ALDERMAN [bustling beside her] My dearest Ann, this is Master Quill, the attorney, who has come to pay his respects to you Master Quill, I present you to my bride.

MASTER QUILL [coming to her] Mistress Ann, I kiss your hand. Nay, I see, the rumour of your beauty is less than the truth

[ANN slowly turns her head to her WAITING-WOMAN, as though requiring her to interpret.]

WAITING-WOMAN [with a curtsey to MASTER QUILL] My mistress desires me to thank you kindly, sir

ALDERMAN [You see, Master Quill, by what make-shifts we must converse !] [To ANN] But, my love, what

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is this look in your eyes? What has befallen you? Was there some riot in the fair? Ah, why was I not there to guard you, my treasure?

MASTER QUILL Come, Master Groat, you see your lady before you safe and sound!

ALDERMAN No, she is trembling, she is pale! Ann, my dove, my darling, why can you not speak to me? Why can you not speak?

[He brings a chair in front of the table C, and seats ANN in it. A silence. ANN turns again to her WAITING-WOMAN, as though bidding her speak.]

WAITING-WOMAN It was but a trifle, sir. My mistress wishes you to think no more of it

ALDERMAN What, is her own husband not to know what has befallen her? Tell me, woman!

WAITING-WOMAN Your pardon, sir. It was but the learned doctor whom we saw at the fair—

ALDERMAN *[standing beside ANN]* What learned doctor?

WAITING-WOMAN He who loosens the tongues of the dumb, to make them speak

ALDERMAN Can there be such a man? *[He turns to MASTER QUILL]* Tell me, Master Quill!

MASTER QUILL It is true this physician is well known. His name is Master Julep, (and he sets up his booth at every London fair.) With him is a surgeon-barber, Master Sunder, (who is skilled in the art of severing the tongue-strings of mutes.) I have seen them perform this operation before a crowd as an advertisement of their craft.

ALDERMAN You have seen it with your own eyes?

[He crosses to MASTER QUILL's place beside ANN]

WAITING-WOMAN *[crossing to ALDERMAN's place beside ANN]* Aye, and we would have seen it too, but my poor mistress stood all a-tremble, and I feared she would swoon away!

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ALDERMAN [*turning on her*] Be silent, woman! [To MASTER QUILL] Now, Master Quill—upon whom was this miracle performed?

MASTER QUILL Upon a maid, if I remember aright She was seated in a chair, where a draught was first administered to her by the apothecary, Master Ounce [—

WAITING-WOMAN Aye, that was the short gentleman's name!

ALDERMAN [*turning on her*] Be silent, I say! [To MASTER QUILL, *as before*] Proceed, Master Quill, proceed [The WAITING-WOMAN retires down stage R]

MASTER QUILL Then Master Sunder, the surgeon, taking an instrument that resembled a common pair of shears— But let me not alarm your good lady, who is certainly pale—

ALDERMAN [*eagerly*] It is no matter Proceed!

MASTER QUILL Taking this instrument, I say, he declared in a loud voice that he would loosen her tongue, and he addressed himself to the task, which was accomplished in a twinkling

ALDERMAN And did the maid speak?

MASTER QUILL Yes, indeed I will not swear that she was dumb before, but she spoke afterwards

ALDERMAN Fluently?

MASTER QUILL Copiously

ALDERMAN [*returning to C of stage*] Ah, Master Quill, why did you not tell me sooner of this famous doctor?

MASTER QUILL You have but this morning told me of your lady's dumbness And as your attorney I must counsel prudence—

ALDERMAN Prudence—with my poor wife awaiting deliverance from her infirmity! *weakly*

MASTER QUILL If she has been dumb from birth I do not see the urgency of the matter

ALDERMAN [*between MASTER QUILL and ANN*] You are heartless, Master Quill! Only look at her now! See

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the mournful eyes she turns upon us as we speak ! Do they not reproach us ? Does she not cry out for the gift of speech ? Consider her youth, her loveliness ! Nay, touch her if you will, and assure yourself that she is a woman and no image in female shape !

MASTER QUILL Since you have married her I will accept your testimony on that point.

ALDERMAN My dear Ann, my heart's delight, would you not rejoice to speak ? Do not your lips burn to tell your husband of your love for him ? See, Master Quill, how she answers me ! Was ever so joyful a movement seen in any woman ? Could her tongue be loosened at this moment I vow we should hear the chant of the seraphim, *no-less* ! This doctor shall be summoned immediately ! Where is my manservant ? Matthew, Matthew ! [The MANSERVANT enters L.

MANSERVANT I am here, your Worship

ALDERMAN Run swiftly to the fair on Smithfield, and fetch me the famous physician, Master Julep, and his surgeon, Master Sunder ! Why do you linger here ?

MANSERVANT How shall I know them, your Worship ?

ALDERMAN Master Quill will tell you.

MASTER QUILL Master Sunder is known by his voice Indeed, I wonder we do not hear him at this distance from the field

ALDERMAN Bring them instantly ! Say that Master Groat, the Alderman, requires their services ! Promise them that I will pay them well !

MANSERVANT I go, your Worship !

[The MANSERVANT runs out R.

ALDERMAN Ah, what happiness is mine ! Ann, dearest Ann, I have endowed you already with my worldly goods Master Quill is here to draw up the settlement of my estate upon you.

MASTER QUILL Ahem ! I think you should now reflect upon the wisdom of that course.

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ALDERMAN No, my fortune shall be hers ! [To ANN] Does not that overjoy you, my darling ?

→ [ANN turns slowly to the WAITING-WOMAN, as before] WAITING-WOMAN My mistress offers her thanks to our Worship

ALDERMAN [standing by ANN and holding her hand] But now I have a greater gift in store for both of us You shall speak, my love, you shall speak ! (No longer must scan your face to read the thoughts you hide from me— alas, so unwillingly !)

MASTER QUILL [coming towards C] One word with you, Master Groat. If you are bent upon this undertaking it is not for me to dissuade you from it

ALDERMAN No, Master Quill, you need not waste your breath !

MASTER QUILL But I must warn you that by the common law the patient's consent must be given to every surgical operation

ALDERMAN [to ANN] I have it, my love, have I not ? [To MASTER QUILL] See how gladly she nods and smiles to me ! I have it, Master Quill !

MASTER QUILL Nay, she must deliver it in writing

ALDERMAN 'A plague upon the lawyers ! [He sits L of table] What shall I write for her ?

MASTER QUILL Ahem ! [Pacing up and down L] Write, Master Groat "I, Ann Groat, married woman, being of sound mind, do hereby solemnly declare that I consent to the loosening of my tongue—"

ALDERMAN [writing] "—of my tongue—"

MASTER QUILL "—by such degree of skill as is commonly used by surgeons, and I further declare that I indemnify my husband, John Groat—"

ALDERMAN That goes without saying, Master Quill !

MASTER QUILL Nothing in the law goes without saying. Write, if you please. "—my husband, John Groat, and his attorney, Oliver Quill, here present,

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against all consequences of the 'said operation, whether they be pain, blood-letting, distemper, death, or any other inconvenience."

WAITING-WOMAN Ah, my poor mistress! She is almost in a swoon already!

MASTER QUILL. Write, Master Groat. "Whereto I solemnly affix my seal and signature, in the presence of these my witnesses—"

ALDERMAN [writing]. "—these my witnesses." [He turns ANN's chair so that the deed lies before her] You shall make your mark, my love. So, it is finished. Here is the deed, Master Quill.

MASTER QUILL It shall be guarded in my strong-room. [He takes the deed and goes down L]

[As the ALDERMAN rises the voice of MASTER SUNDER is heard in the street]

ALDERMAN But what sound do I hear? Is a storm approaching?

MASTER QUILL That is the voice of the surgeon, Master Sunder.

ALDERMAN Is it possible?

MASTER SUNDER [in the distance] Make way, make way, good people all, for Master Julep, the wise physician. Make way, make way!

WAITING-WOMAN Ah, I fear for my poor mistress! See how she trembles now!

ALDERMAN I am myself alarmed, that I confess. [To ANN] My love, will you await the faculty in your own chamber? No, she shakes her head; she wishes to remain! My brave Ann!

MASTER SUNDER [outside] Should any poor man have a wart upon his nose let him but wait, and we will presently remove it free of cost. Nay, we will extirpate a tumour for the first-comer of a score—only make way! Where is the house of Alderman Groat, the haberdasher, who seeks our aid?

[Knocking at the door.]

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MASTER QUILL [crossing over R towards the door] After
the blast of his voice truly his knock is but a tinkle [The ALDERMAN hurries to the door.]

ALDERMAN Ah, let me open myself to these great doctors!

[ANN has risen, and she and her WAITING-WOMAN cross over L, where they stand together] MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE enter first, and bow low on either side of the doorway. They are followed by MASTER JULEP, the physician. MASTER JULEP advances to the C of stage before he speaks

MASTER JULEP Where is Alderman Groat, the haberdasher?

ALDERMAN [coming forward] I am here

MASTER JULEP I am Master Julep, the physician, at your service. These are my humble fellow-craftsmen, Master Sunder, the surgeon, and Master Ounce, the apothecary

[MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE bow low in turn then both go down stage R]

ALDERMAN Masters, I bid you welcome to my house.

MASTER JULEP And, pray, where is the subject of our skill?

ALDERMAN [pointing to ANN] Alas, you see before you my own wife, who implores your aid! [requests her aid]

MASTER JULEP [addressing ANN] Madam, I am privileged to grant that boon. But you are silent. You perceive, masters—she speaks not a word!

ALDERMAN I must tell you, good gentlemen, that my wife—

MASTER JULEP Say no more, Master Alderman. It is for us to establish the nature of the ailment. Bring me my spectacles [MASTER OUNCE hands them to him] Hum! I perceive that she is young and comely. Pray feel her pulse, Master Sunder

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MASTER SUNDER Most willingly, honoured master!

[MASTER SUNDER approaches ANN.]

MASTER JULEP. Nay, I will feel it myself. [He comes to ANN and feels her pulse.] The beat is gentle, gentle—
Let her be seated

ALDERMAN I wish to say, masters, that my wife—

[MASTER SUNDER crosses to ANN, and brings her to the chair L of the table.]

MASTER JULEP. Do you discover any deformity of her figure, Master Sunder?

[MASTER SUNDER turns ANN round and round before seating her.] The ALDERMAN goes down stage R

MASTER SUNDER None as yet, honoured master, none as yet

ALDERMAN [returning to them]. Pray let me speak, good masters! Unhappily my wife—

MASTER JULEP. Have patience, Master Alderman, patience! Come, Master Ounce, regard her. Is she not as sound as a roach? ^{quint}

[MASTER OUNCE makes his examination of ANN.]

MASTER OUNCE That is but an appearance, no doubt.

MASTER JULEP You are right, Master Ounce a physician cannot be deceived! Nay, I have already inferred the cause of her disorder

[He thrusts MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE aside, and they go down stage R, chanting in unison.]

MASTER SUNDER O wise physician!

MASTER OUNCE O honoured master!

ALDERMAN I am in despair! Pray let me tell you, masters—

[He approaches MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE]

MASTER JULEP. I will tell you, Master Alderman, what ails your wife [The ALDERMAN turns to him] Prepare yourself for grave news She suffers from an aphony

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ALDERMAN An aphony? What is that?

MASTER JULEP It is otherwise known to the learned as obmutescence, or to the vulgar as want of speech

ALDERMAN Alas, my poor wife has been dumb from her birth!

MASTER JULEP Master Alderman, you have the honour to confirm my judgment, / I was myself about to declare her malady inherent, or, in other words, indigenous and ingenerate. ^{Foul (paw)} _{is new way}

WAITING-WOMAN. Alas, my poor mistress!

/ ALDERMAN Nay, masters, I swear it is only inborn!

MASTER JULEP Doubtless you agree with me, Master Sunder?

MASTER SUNDER [bowing low] I agree, honoured master

MASTER JULEP [coming down R to ALDERMAN] As for yourself, Master Alderman, you are the wisest of men.

ALDERMAN Because I have married a dumb wife?

MASTER JULEP Because you have sent for me, Master Alderman! [He returns C of stage] How rare is such discernment in a man of your riches and rank, inhabiting so noble a mansion as this! There is but one doctor who can cure your wife's infirmity, and I am he!

ALDERMAN Indeed, I am glad to hear it, Master Julep!

MASTER JULEP By the grace of Heaven and the aid of Master Sunder, my surgeon, I have loosened the tongue of countless mutes in my time (Nay, it is reckoned that the words I have released, were they written down in never so fine a hand, would stretch from Cheapside to the mountains of Tartary As for the ligaments I have severed in this same operation, a ship's rope could be made of them and yet leave fathoms to spare)

ALDERMAN Is it possible?

MASTER JULEP Let me but reach out my hand towards your wife [He takes ANN by the shoulder] This arm is

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a divining-rod. It tells me that her lips are a well of joyful speech

ALDERMAN [*coming to C. of stage*] Aye, that is truly my hope, Master Julep ! I would have her speak to me lovingly, and therefore I have entreated your aid

MASTER JULEP. Then let your lady be led to her chamber, if you please.

ALDERMAN. Can you not perform your surgery here ?

MASTER JULEP. The tongue of an alderman's wife must not be loosened in the public view, like any pauper's. Master Ounce will assure you of the need for her withdrawal

MASTER OUNCE The prone posture is most favourable to the efficacy of my potion ~~in separating~~ ^{and} ~~binding~~

MASTER SUNDER And to my cleavage of the ligaments

[MASTER OUNCE and MASTER SUNDER go ~~towards~~

ANN, as if to lead her from the room

ALDERMAN Stay, good masters, for mercy's sake ! What is this potion you speak of ? What are these ligaments ?

MASTER JULEP Master Alderman, it is not for the laity to know the secrets of our craft. Nay, we should not speak of them in the patient's own presence

ALDERMAN [*taking leave of ANN L C*] Go, my poor Ann, ~~(but first let me embrace you !)~~ Go, my treasure !

[ANN and her WAITING-WOMAN go out L, and

MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE stand awaiting MASTER JULEP'S orders.

MASTER JULEP That is well. Come, masters, let us follow her

ALDERMAN May I not be present at your cure ?

MASTER JULEP Assuredly not, Master Alderman. The birth of speech must be veiled in a decent privacy

MASTER QUILL Ahem ! -- [Interposing] As his Worship's attorney, Master Julep, I must support his right to be present, should he so desire.

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MASTER JULEP. Master Quill, we of the learned professions understand each other. Need I say more?

MASTER QUILL. I thank you, Master Julep, and withdraw my claim. *[MASTER QUILL goes down stage L]*

ALDERMAN Nay, that you shall not! I demand what is my right, Master Julep!

MASTER JULEP. So be it. Call for your instruments, Master Sunder

MASTER SUNDER. Ho, there! Bring me the instruments that are carried on my mule! *[x]*

[He goes to the door R., and the leathern bag of instruments is handed to him]

ALDERMAN On his mule? What armoury can this be? - *[MASTER SUNDER opens the bag and displays its contents.]*

MASTER SUNDER My instruments are ready, honoured master!

ALDERMAN *[crossing over R.]* Ah, what do I behold? That saw, those knives, those pliers!

MASTER SUNDER *[showing his instruments].* My lancets and my forceps, Master Alderman!

ALDERMAN *[recoiling]* I shudder for my poor Ann!

MASTER JULEP Do you still desire to be a witness of our skill?

ALDERMAN No, masters, not for the world! I pray you, no!

MASTER JULEP Then we permit you to remain below *[He goes to the door L.]* Your instruments, Master Sunder! Your chest, Master Ounce! *[x]*

MASTER SUNDER All is ready, honoured master!

MASTER OUNCE All is ready, honoured master!

[MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE cross over together to L C., while MASTER QUILL goes up stage L, as if to join the party in leaving the hall.]

ALDERMAN Ah, not so fast, masters, I beg of you! *[He goes C, behind the table]* Here is wine! Pray refresh yourselves before your dreadful task!

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MASTER JULEP [*blandly*]. Indeed a happy thought, Master Alderman! [He joins the ALDERMAN behind the table] The draught will expel a multitude of bodily humours [To his colleagues] A happy thought, masters, is it not?

MASTER SUNDER, It will nerve our sinews, honoured master.

[MASTER SUNDER comes to the table, where the ALDERMAN is beginning to pour out wine. MASTER JULEP calmly takes the flask from his host's hand and thrusts him aside, making room for MASTER SUNDER]

MASTER JULEP Nay, let me pour the wine, Master Alderman, for I see your hand is shaking. [He distributes cups of wine, while the ALDERMAN goes R. of the table] Will you take a phial of liquor with us, Master Ounce?

MASTER OUNCE You are too kind, honoured master [He joins MASTER SUNDER and MASTER JULEP behind the table, and drinks] Your health, Master Alderman!

ALDERMAN [reaches out his hand for a cup of wine, but is forestalled by MASTER SUNDER, who is standing nearest him] Alas, masters, it is not my health that troubles me, but my wife's!

MASTER JULEP Ha, ha! Very good, Master Alderman! You are a wag!

ALDERMAN Indeed I did not know it, gentlemen!

MASTER JULEP [pouring wine] Another cup, Master Sunder? A cup, Master Quill? We of the learned professions must not quarrel

MASTER QUILL No, indeed, Master Julep!

[MASTER QUILL comes down to left of table, and joins the group of drinkers]

MASTER JULEP Your health, Master Alderman!

MASTER SUNDER Your health!

MASTER OUNCE Your health!

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[All drink deeply, MASTER SUNDER and MASTER JULEP turning their backs upon the ALDERMAN, who endeavours to attract their attention]

ALDERMAN *[despairingly]* Master Quill—Master Julep—Master Sunder—Master Ounce—I beg of you, masters, not to forget your errand! *work (answering)*

MASTER JULEP *[turning to him between two gulps of wine]*
Nay, do not jest again! Very good, Master Alderman!
Ha, ha!

MASTER SUNDER *[setting down his cup]* Ha, ha, ha!

MASTER OUNCE *[joining in]* Ha, ha! Ha, ha! Ha, ha!

[All laugh together, except the ALDERMAN, who makes hopeless gestures, as though to quell their merriment]

[The curtain falls to denote a lapse of time, and rises again on the same scene, the same evening. The stage is empty. There is a knock at the door R. The MANSERVANT enters L, crosses over to open the door, and admits MASTER QUILL, who comes R C]

MASTER QUILL Is his Worship the Alderman at home this evening?

MANSERVANT Yes, Master Quill

[The MANSERVANT comes L C]

MASTER QUILL So now it seems you know my name?

MANSERVANT Pray be seated, Master Quill

[MASTER QUILL sits R of table]

His Worship bade me inform him of your coming

MASTER QUILL No doubt he is with your mistress?

MANSERVANT His Worship is in his counting-house I will bring him to you, *servant* *[Exit L.]*

MASTER QUILL *[alone]*, That is a hasty fellow, he was gone again before I could ask after his mistress But no matter, I shall hear the good news from her own lips, if the surgeon did his work aright. And I must claim my share of his fee, for I swear he does not profit by

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such a patient every day [Rises.] Here is the Alderman himself. [The ALDERMAN enters] I wish your Worship good evening.

ALDERMAN Good evening to you, Master Quill

[He remains on the threshold of the doorway L.

MASTER QUILL. And how goes it with your lady wife since this morning's little operation?

[The ALDERMAN, still in the doorway, looks apprehensively behind him, then closes the door —

ALDERMAN I thank you, Master Quill, she is well enough, well enough

MASTER QUILL Why were you in your counting-house, and not at her bedside?

ALDERMAN [comes to L. of table] I had some reckonings to prepare. And, as I say, my wife is well enough, ~~and~~

MASTER QUILL Then have the faculty truly loosened her tongue?

ALDERMAN [sits L. of table]. Aye, Master Quill, of that there can be no doubt!

MASTER QUILL [sits R. of table] Tell me what has passed

ALDERMAN I was admitted to her chamber to hear the first words that she should utter Ah, Master Quill, you can imagine my feelings at that moment! There she lay propped among her pillows, with a smile of happiness on her face. The surgeon was gathering up his weapons, the apothecary was mixing the potion that should finally restore her. Scarcely had it passed her lips when she opened them again, and, looking earnestly upon me, said, "My darling, I can speak!"

MASTER QUILL Well, that was a good beginning.

ALDERMAN It was a rare beginning Nay, it was all I wished to hear! She called me her darling, she said that she could speak!

MASTER QUILL And what then?

ALDERMAN At these words there arose such a clamour

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from the faculty, in praise of themselves and one another that I could hear no more. Master Sunder, the surgeon, especially was in good voice. While the din was at its height I saw that my wife's lips were still moving, and, thrusting the faculty from the room, I hastened to her side. Alas, Master Quill, judge of my dismay to hear her prattle unceasingly of ribbons and laces, velvets and muslins and silks !

MASTER QUILL. That should not unduly distress a haberdasher like yourself

ALDERMAN It is the volume of her speech, even more than the matter, that disquiets me

MASTER QUILL Remember that she has passed her lifetime thus far without speaking, and some arrears must in the course of nature be discharged. Happily she is young, or you might indeed be overwhelmed by her pent-up flood of utterance

ALDERMAN [*leaning his head on his hand*] I am overwhelmed already, Master Quill !

MASTER QUILL The torrent will subside, Master Groat. Have patience, it will at least diminish

ALDERMAN Ah, it is plain that you have not yet heard her !

MASTER QUILL I shall presently have that satisfaction. Meanwhile here is your deed of settlement, which I beg you to read at your leisure,

for [MASTER QUILL proffers a parchment, which the ALDERMAN *lays unheeded* on the table.]

ALDERMAN Shall I ever enjoy a moment's peace again ? Master Quill, she leapt from her bed to address me, she pursued me step by step to my counting-house, until I locked her out. The very servants are deafened by her ! Nay, when she stood at a window this afternoon conversing with her maid a crowd assembled in the street to listen, and the watch came knocking to demand the reason for this disturbance of the City traffic !

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MASTER QUILL I see your plight is graver than I thought Perhaps I had better take my leave [Rises

ALDERMAN [rises] No, Master Quill, for the love of Heaven do not desert me! You are my attorney, tell me what I am to do!

MASTER QUILL You can only have patience. But do I hear her?

ALDERMAN. Yes, she is coming this way! Ah, stand by me, Master Quill!

MASTER QUILL Let us seat ourselves and consider this deed of settlement. When she sees that we are occupied she will hardly interrupt us.

[MASTER QUILL seats himself briskly, while the ALDERMAN subsides hopelessly into his chair

ALDERMAN. Alas, you do not know her!

[ANN enters L, and comes quickly to her husband

ANN My darling, so you are there! (Looked for you everywhere, and you were not to be found) They told me that you were still in your counting-house, but our servants are lazy good-for-nothings who say whatever comes first into their heads. Do you not agree with me, my darling, John? [Leans on his shoulder

ALDERMAN My love, this is Master Quill, the attorney, whom you remember We have important business to transact!

[ANN goes C behind table, and gives her hand to MASTER QUILL, who rises formally and seats himself again

ANN Of course I remember Master Quill very well How could you think I had forgotten him? Why, (he was here this morning when we came from the fair, and) it was he who told you of the famous doctor who loosened my tongue (I am sure, John, you are very grateful to him) But must you be busy on such a day as this? Remember it is the feast of Saint Bartholomew, when all the town makes holiday That is the reason

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for the fair on Smithfield, is it not so, Master Quill? Besides, my birthday falls this day week have you forgotten that? What are these papers before you? No, you need not tell me your affairs can wait until to-morrow

ALDERMAN My love, they are your affairs!

MASTER QUILL This deed of settlement is to be your birthday present, Mistress Ann

ANN A birthday present for me! [She goes *L. of the* ALDERMAN] Ah, my darling John, let me kiss you! [Kisses him] So you had not forgotten after all! (I was sure of it, although until to-day I could not tell you so,) And what is a deed of settlement, Master Quill? (I know you are a great lawyer, and you must be able to tell me everything)

MASTER QUILL Mistress Ann, your husband wishes to endow you very handsomely ~~for wife a qd~~

ANN My dear generous John! Let me kiss you again! [Kisses him] To think, Master Quill, that I was only a poor orphan until he married me, and now I am one of the great ladies of Cheapside! It is true I come of good family—that goes without saying. Yes, we are first cousins to the landed gentry, and some people might say that John had done well for himself. My aunt Judith said so on the very day of the wedding [To the ALDERMAN] Do you remember, my love? But I see you are busy, Master Quill, and I must not disturb you.

MASTER QUILL I thank you, Mistress Ann

ANN Only tell me one thing Shall I be rich enough to buy the hood I saw yesterday at the shop of Master Ell in the Poultry? ~~hood dno~~

ALDERMAN [raising his clenched hands] Alas, I despair! My rival, my rival! ~~pphew!~~

MASTER QUILL Madam, you will be rich enough to buy Master Ell's whole establishment, but ~~Master Groat here would prefer you to deal at his own~~

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ANN. John, I promise you I will think no more of that hood, though I had set my heart upon it. Why do you not keep such pretty things? It was edged with satin, Master Quill, and trimmed with fine lace. Nay, I will think no more of it!

ALDERMAN That is well

ANN [L C at first, then beginning to walk round the table] Other matters are more pressing, that is true. There is the furnishing of this house, which I must undertake afresh from the beginning. Our plate, our linen, our earthenware—all are cracked or moth-eaten or tarnished. Yes, my love, I must confess it, even before a guest! There is scarcely an article in use that does not need repair. These very cushions on which you are seated must be re-covered forthwith. Let me show them to you [She comes below table to C.] [I will trouble you but a moment, Master Quill.] [MASTER QUILL rises.] Do you not see how the leather has perished? Can you not feel it? [Goes R.] That is an effect of the City air, for too many fires are burned in winter-time, and smoke and damp are enemies of leather. But, tell me, are such seats fit for an alderman's household? [She replaces cushion, and comes C, to front of table] Then look at this cover on the table [Is not the embroidery worn to a thread? Nay, you shall pick up your parchments presently, but look at that crazy footstool first. Only consider how a bachelor can live, and how needful is a woman's hand after his marriage!]

ALDERMAN [rises] My love, all this may be true, but now, I pray you, leave us!

[MASTER QUILL is bending to pick up his parchment when ANN addresses him again]

ANN There, Master Quill, you see that the best of husbands cannot endure to have his faults admitted before company [To the ALDERMAN] Am I not right, my pet? But I vow I could take you from room to

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room, from cupboard to cupboard, and show you such havoc and disorder as must make a woman blush! No doubt a part of the trouble is due to your servants, who must have robbed you shamefully [Advancing on the ALDERMAN L C] You are too trustful, John you have never kept a watch upon them as you should But now they shall know that a mistress is here

ALDERMAN It is all too plain!

[Goes down stage L, retreating from her.

ANN [returning to C] As for the neighbours, what they must think of us I cannot imagine Not all of them are civil and obliging as your friend Master Quill, who stands here and says nothing I vow he can see as clearly as anyone what is necessary to our position in life

[She advances down stage R towards MASTER QUILL, who retreats from her in his turn

MASTER QUILL Mistress Ann, it seems you have private matters to discuss with your husband My business can wait until another day

[He turns as if to go out R

ALDERMAN Nay, do not leave me, Master Quill! For mercy's sake, do not leave me now!

[He drags MASTER QUILL back, and thrusts him into the seat L of table

ANN Master Quill shall stay with us, and then he will be able to judge for himself

[MASTER QUILL mops his brow, and sits helpless Meanwhile the ALDERMAN has sunk into the chair R of table ANN begins to walk round them again, and they follow her movements with their eyes

I have ordered a dish of lamb sweetbreads, for I know you love a fry, do you not, my pet? Our cook pretended that the butcher could not supply us on a feast-day, but I sent her with a message that if he failed us we would deal elsewhere That is the only way of bringing

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such folk to reason And now I will not disturb you any more ; you shall be seated and go on with your deed of settlement. Stay, are you sure there is ink enough in that horn before you ? Let me see [She overturns the inkhorn upon MASTER QUILL's knees.] There, now I have spilled it , the horn was overfull, thanks to some careless servant Pray do not distress yourself, Master Quill , I will myself sponge your hose for you. Let me but fetch a napkin and warm water, with a little salts of lemon to take out the stain. Do not stir, Master Quill, lest the moisture should spread. I will be with you directly. [She runs out L]

ALDERMAN [seated R. of table, buries his face in his hands] Master Quill, my head will split ! ~~and~~ ^{and} runs !

MASTER QUILL [seated L of table, leaning back]. I confess this lull is pleasing to me, though I am bespattered and somewhat damp.

ALDERMAN [looking up] I am a lost man ! What shall I do ? A lost man !

MASTER QUILL We can but hope that she will weary her tongue.

ALDERMAN. Merciful heaven, she is upon us again !

[Rises and goes down stage R.
[ANN re-enters L , with a basin and napkin, and kneels beside MASTER QUILL

ANN Here, Master Quill, here is the remedy for your stain Let me swab it for you first , nay, do not fear I will not scald you . the water is but lukewarm. Feel it for yourself if you will And here is the salts of lemon, which all the world knows is really the juice of sorrel. Is it not strange that such a thing should be so wrongly named ? Yes, and it is dangerous too, for salts of lemon is a deadly poison, Master Quill I have heard of a poor lady, troubled by a thirst and fond of lemons, who mistook the name and drank close upon a quartan of it, so that she perished in convulsions

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Yet it is true that sorrel in the leaf is harmless enough, we even make a salad of it in the country. The taste is bitter, that is all. There was a time when I knew the virtues of all the herbs, but now from living in the town I fear I shall forget them. There, you see the stain is as good as washed away. [Rises] What remains is only moisture, and that will quickly dry in this warm weather, especially if you walk a little in the room. That will prevent the risk of a chill. [Going towards the ALDERMAN, who stands R staring at her] Is it not so, John? Why do you look at me so strangely? What is troubling you, my darling?

ALDERMAN [to himself] Ah, shall I answer her or no?

ANN Perhaps you wish me to leave you to your conversation. You know I would not interrupt you for the world. [She takes her husband by the arm, and leads him C, where she seats him opposite MASTER QUILL, in the seat R of table. Then, busying herself between them] Only let me dry your parchment for you, and set the table to rights. [She stands back, in front of the table, and regards them] There, now you are both at your ease again. But you must not be long, for our supper is cooking, and sweetbreads must be served as soon as they are browned. You see I am a good housewife, Master Quill, and understand these matters, though my John was unaware of it until to-day. [To the ALDERMAN, who is staring at her as he sits] Am I not right, my pet? You are still looking at me strangely. What is it, my darling? Have you no appetite? Fie, you must have eaten too much at last night's banquet of the aldermen. [To MASTER QUILL] Ah, Master Quill, those City banquets should be put down by law! Scarcely one night passes when the haberdashers or the grocers or the fishmongers do not entertain each other, leaving their wives at home and giving themselves over to the most reckless gluttony. It is well enough for the provision

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'merchants, for so they dispose of the superfluity of their wares The skinners too may be allowed a feast from time to time, and the salters are right to drink in moderation But for haberdashers like my husband, or shoemakers like Master Foote, it is sheer waste of good money and good health. Mistress Foote spoke to me of this but yesterday. She was my first acquaintance among the City matrons, and I must say I found her very civil, though she is perhaps inclined to gossip I knew that as soon as she complained to me of her husband's meanness. She should have kept her own counsel on that score, for I was little better than a stranger to her Still, I think she is a kind woman at heart, and I shall ask her to visit me now that we can talk with one another. She lives over the way, so that we can meet as often as we please Nay, we have only to open our casements and speak over the street, over the heads of the people I must say these jutting houses of the City are very convenient in that respect, though they lessen the privacy of one's chamber a great deal I had never seen such houses until coming to town the other day. In the country there is often a mile or two between neighbours It may be true that Master Foote is close in money matters, but then his wife declares that trade is bad John says that cobblers are often discontented folk from thinking too much of other men's shoes One of them was hanged as a follower of Master Tyler after the men of Kent marched upon the City. Those must have been dreadful and riotous days, though living in the country we heard but little of them Of course, Master Foote is something better than a common cobbler, or else we should not know him, or his lady either. [Turning suddenly to the ALDERMAN] We met her as we were walking in Cheapside—did we not, my pet? She was well enough dressed, but that is easily understood, for she is a customer of ours. I see

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that one cannot be too careful in walking through the City streets, for scarcely had we parted from her when a young man I did not know at all smiled in my face and doffed his cap to me

ALDERMAN I am stunned, I am dazed ... Master Quill, what was that she said?

MASTER QUILL Your lady spoke of a young man, Master Groat

ANN [comes R of table to her husband's side, leaning on his shoulder] Have you forgotten, my darling? Why, you were there with me, I was on your arm, and you dragged me away Do you not remember the young man?

ALDERMAN I remember too well! Tell me only—what did you think of that fellow?

ANN I must say, my love, I thought him good-looking

ALDERMAN [springing from his chair] Ah! Ah! The hussy!

ANN [turning calmly to MASTER QUILL] And very civil too, though it is true we did not know each other. Perhaps he mistook me for another lady In the country all the neighbours know each other, but here in town it is easily possible to be mistaken He was well dressed too, but I know that means nothing, for Mistress Foote tells me all the City apprentices ape the fashions of their betters in these days [To the ALDERMAN] Is it not so, my pet?

ALDERMAN [going down stage R, wringing his hands] Will you be silent, shameless creature?

ANN [pursuing him R] John, my love, what is this look on your face? Why do you speak to me so roughly? I think truly you must be unwell

ALDERMAN [crossing to L] I am in a fever!

ANN [following him L] Let me feel your brow, my love [He stops short before her] Nay, do not stare at

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me so ! I think you have a head-melancholy, for your face is ruddier than it should be. I remember my uncle was in the same disorder once after eating too much of garlic, so that the fumes mounted to his brain. The physician said that he must not be left without company, a bright and cheerful discourse is the chief remedy for such ailments. You may depend on me for that.

ALDERMAN [*coming to table L.C.*] Master Quill, I shall go mad !

ANN [*following him*] There, my-pet, you should calm yourself, lest the distempered blood mount too far and bring on an apoplexy. For then we should have to send for the physician, and he would certainly bleed you Nay, he might even shave your crown and bore a hole to let the vapours disperse into the air. I have heard of such a happening to a poor Kentish gentleman, and the hole was kept open a month together. But, alas, when it was suffered to heal his melancholy returned again tenfold.

ALDERMAN [*C of stage, staring before him*] The physician ? Did she say the physician ?

MASTER QUILL [*rises, and stands L.C.*] Yes, Master Groat.

ANN [*beside the ALDERMAN C*] Come, my-pet, there is bran in the house. I will myself prepare a poultice for your head.

ALDERMAN For my ears ! For my ears !

ANN No, for your head, my love—

ALDERMAN [*crying out*] For my ears ! Ah, who will heal the blows of sound ? Would that I had never loosened your tongue ! Would that I had never married you, baggage that you are ! Go, leave my hearing, leave my sight ! Go, before I do you an injury !

ANN [*takes refuge behind MASTER QUILL, L.C.*] Alas, my poor husband is run mad !

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ALDERMAN [*thrusting Master Quill aside and driving her before him*] Do you hear me, creature? Go!

[ANN runs out L]

MASTER QUILL [*seats himself L of table with a long-drawn sigh of relief*] She is gone, Master Groat. We are at peace again. [The ALDERMAN paces up and down

ALDERMAN Call me my servant! Matthew, Matthew!

MASTER QUILL Nay, reflect a moment, Master Groat—

ALDERMAN [*calling*] Matthew, Matthew!

[The MANSERVANT enters L]

MANSERVANT I am here, your Worship

ALDERMAN Run again to the fair on Smithfield, more swiftly than before, and fetch me Master Julep, the physician, with his train! Say that I require his services this hour, this instant!

MANSERVANT I obey, your Worship!

[He goes out R ALDERMAN throws himself into the chair R of table and stares before him

MASTER QUILL What is your purpose, Master Groat?

ALDERMAN This doctor shall make her dumb again, that is all

MASTER QUILL That is impossible! A lawyer like myself can tell you that a cord once severed cannot be rejoined

ALDERMAN Then he shall answer to me for his skill! I will enter a claim for damages against him in the court of common pleas! I will sue him for the return of those precious ligaments of which he has despoiled me!

MASTER QUILL Master Alderman, far be it from me as your attorney to dissuade you from going to law. Yet I must remind you that the ligaments you speak of were her own property, being *in situ* beneath her tongue, and, so to say, freehold. They were removed by her consent, and therefore she alone can enter such a suit

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ALDERMAN. Then he shall uproot her vocal organs, and extirpate her faculty of speech !

MASTER QUILL Alas, it is all too certain that she will not consent to such a cure. Nay, should you force it on her she herself would claim damages for common assault

ALDERMAN. Master Quill, is there no justice in this world ? Has a husband no rights ? I married a dumb wife, and not this chatterbox, this magpie who assaults my ears with her cackle !

MASTER QUILL You have sent for the doctors, and they must prescribe your remedy. But if I may advise you do not make your wife an heiress as well as a gossip I counsel you not to sign this deed that lies on your table

ALDERMAN. You are right, Master Quill. Not a penny shall she have from me !

[He seizes the parchment and tears it across

MASTER QUILL That is well. Now here come the doctors you have sent for

[MASTER SUNDER'S voice is heard.

MASTER SUNDER *[in a loud voice, as before]* Make way, make way, good people all, for Master Julep, the physician, and Master Sunder, the surgeon, and Master Ounce, their apothecary !

ALL TOGETHER. Make way, make way !

ALDERMAN Ah, let them come ! I am ready !

[The ALDERMAN and MASTER QUILL rise. MASTER JULEP enters first, and comes down stage R, while MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE remain in the doorway.

MASTER JULEP Master Alderman, I am yours to command. What good fortune brings us again to your door ?

ALDERMAN *[crossing over to him]* An ill fortune, Master Julep ! Never has any sufferer needed your aid as I need it now !

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MASTER JULEP Once more, Master Alderman, I praise your wisdom in sending for me! Master Sunder and Master Ounce, you will examine his Worship

[MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE advance upon the ALDERMAN, and lead him forcibly to C in front of table, where they halt him before a chair

MASTER JULEP remains R

MASTER SUNDER [R C, rolling up his sleeves] Pray be seated, Master Alderman, and be so good as to loosen your doublet

[MASTER QUILL, with an air of avoiding responsibility, takes a stool from under the table and goes down stage L.

MASTER OUNCE [L C, setting down his medicine-chest]. Pray be seated, Master Alderman, and do me the honour to show me your tongue

ALDERMAN [looking from one to the other] Alas, good masters, you mistake my meaning! It is not my tongue that is in question, but my wife's!

MASTER JULEP [R C, approaching them]. Do you deny the cure I have accomplished in her case?

MASTER SUNDER [booming at the ALDERMAN] Do you venture to reflect upon our skill?

MASTER OUNCE [chirping from the other side] Do you trifle with us, Master Alderman?

ALDERMAN Not for the world, good masters! But you have done your work too well!

MASTER JULEP Does your wife suffer any discomfort in her conversation?

ALDERMAN No, Master Julep, the discomfort is mine!

MASTER SUNDER Has she any impediment in her speech?

ALDERMAN Alas, none that I can discover!

MASTER OUNCE Was not my potion efficacious in restoring her?

ALDERMAN She speaks too much, good masters, and

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that is why I have summoned you in such haste I beg of you, I implore you, make her dumb again ! Restore those ligaments you have so cruelly severed !

[The ALDERMAN turns to MASTER JULEP and falls upon his knees in supplication]

MASTER JULEP [blandly] You hear him, masters ? Such is the strange ignorance of the laity in matters of science ! Can we wonder that impostors flourish on every hand ?

MASTER SUNDER Indeed, no, master !

MASTER OUNCE No, indeed !

MASTER JULEP [raises the ALDERMAN, and places him in a chair C.] Master Alderman, there are bounds even to the skill of such learned craftsmen as you see before you We possess remedies to loosen tongues, but none to bind them

MASTER QUILL [from his seat L of stage] So much I was able to tell you, Master Groat.

ALDERMAN [seated C] Then I am lost, for I cannot withstand such a tempest of words ! You have not heard her, masters ? You withdrew before the storm was let loose upon me ! Of your mercy, I pray you give me peace again !

MASTER JULEP It is true that we of the faculty are often summoned to effect an after-cure in such a case Am I not right, Master Sunder ?

MASTER SUNDER [R C] You are right, honoured master

ALDERMAN [to MASTER JULEP] Then will you seal up her lips ?

MASTER JULEP Our operation will be performed upon yourself, Master Alderman

ALDERMAN Upon myself ?

MASTER JULEP Happily there is a remedy for the discomfort you suffer from your wife's excessive speech. It is the state of surdity.

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ALDERMAN Surdity? What is that?

MASTER JULEP [*close to the ALDERMAN, with one hand on his shoulder*] It is otherwise known to the learned as cophosis, or to the vulgar as want of hearing. Such a boon may be either inherent—that is to say, indigenous and ingenerate—or it may be accidental—that is to say, adventitious and arbitrary—as, for example, a surdity resulting from a box on the ear, a kick from a mule, a discharge of gunpowder, or such untoward event. I counsel you to reject all these latter methods of producing the state you desire, for they are unduly painful and sometimes, alas, only temporary.

ALDERMAN Not so fast, Master Julep! Do I understand that you wish to make me deaf for good? *forev*

MASTER JULEP Your understanding is perfect, Master Alderman

ALDERMAN I thank you, so is my hearing. I have no wish to be deaf!

MASTER QUILL [*advancing to L C, with a formal bow*] I regret that my client rejects your proposal, Master Julep

MASTER JULEP [*returning the bow*] Master Quill, we of the learned professions understand each other. You will doubtless assist me in bringing him to reason

MASTER QUILL [*to the ALDERMAN*] Hum! It is true, Master Groat, that you should listen to the faculty with an open mind

ALDERMAN I prefer to listen to them with open ears. No, Master Quill, I am firm upon this matter!

MASTER QUILL At least allow the learned surgeon to explain the nature of his cure

MASTER JULEP I assure you, Master Alderman, that it is painless. The surdity will be produced by a certain potion which Master Ounce carries in a phial. You have it, Master Ounce?

MASTER OUNCE I have it, honoured master

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[He takes the phial to MASTER JULEP, and then withdraws down stage L]

MASTER JULEP [to the ALDERMAN]. Here is the draught in question. ~~You perceive that~~ it is colourless and odourless. Master Sunder will have the honour to convey it to your lips. ~~No sooner have you drunk it than you will feel a soft vibration of the tympanum, vulgarly called the ear-drum, and~~ presently you will hear no more—no, not even the thundering of nineteen hundred cannon at a salvo. Come, Master Ounce!

[MASTER OUNCE approaches with the phial]

ALDERMAN [violently] Away, away! I will have none of your potion! I will not be deaf!

MASTER QUILL [interposing between the ALDERMAN and MASTER OUNCE] Nay, Master Groat, do not be so hasty! I have myself heard your good lady, and it may well be that the learned faculty advise you aright.

ALDERMAN [beside himself, going up to each in turn]. Ah, wretched attorney, abominable surgeon, baneful physician, pestiferous apothecary, are you in league against my ears? Must I drive you from the house on which you have brought ruin already? *[They close in upon him, but he breaks from them and goes L C, calling]* Ho, there, my servants! Matthew! Thomas! Rid me of this rabble! Away with these rogues and quacksalvers!

✓ They close upon him again. There is an uproar, in the midst of which ANN enters

ANN [enters L and crosses quickly to C', dispersing the group] Ah, what do I hear, what do I see? My poor husband! Masters, you must make allowance for him. he is certainly mad! Pray do not take offence, but aid me to govern his frenzy. See, here is a poultice I have myself compounded for his head, to reduce the dis-temperature. With your permission I will place it on his brow—

ALDERMAN Away, woman, away!

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE

[He seizes ANN by the arm and thrusts her L, but she immediately returns C and addresses the faculty, leaving the ALDERMAN L C

ANN You see, masters, how he mishandles his poor wife, to whom you have so mercifully restored the gift of speech. He has been in this mood an hour past—nay, since I first addressed a word to him and Master Quill, who is my witness That is one of the signs of head-melancholy, is it not, good masters?

MASTER JULEP [R C] Yes, indeed, mistress!

MASTER SUNDER [R down stage] Undoubtedly!

MASTER OUNCE [R down stage] Beyond question!

ALDERMAN [L C] Ah! The baggage! The vixen!

ANN [C of stage] You hear him still, masters? You see I am right! I vow it is due to those City banquets he frequents, where too many liquors are mixed and rise up to trouble the brain. I doubt not, masters, you have heard of the band of young sparks who came one night into a tavern, and from the mingling of their liquor imagined themselves to be in a vessel tossed by a storm upon the waves, so that to prevent shipwreck they flung all the tables and chairs out of the window to make rafts for themselves on that sea, as they supposed, and all who saw them were astonished at their folly, but they themselves continued in the fear of death by drowning, until one of them, throwing an empty pitcher after the rest, was amazed to hear it crack upon the solid ground, and the watch passing at that moment and being struck by flying pieces of the earthenware, they were all seized together and brought before the magistrate, and, being still troubled in their wits by the liquor, they made excuses to him, one of them saying that he was in the hold of the ship all the while, and therefore could not have thrown any piece of furniture from the portholes into the water, whilst another declared that he was at the time the helmsman of the

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ship, meaning that he was endeavouring vainly to turn the spigot of a cask of ale, and yet another, foolishly mistaking the magistrate, who was bearded, for the sea-god Neptune, swore that if he and his fellows ever came to dry land again they would build an altar to his service, whereat I have heard that the magistrate laughed a great deal, and bade them sleep off their folly, and go their ways, but I would have been stricter with them, for their pranks are not to be permitted in a city where there are many passers-by [*The faculty gaze at one another bewildered*] How many evils spring from intemperance in meat and drink! So it is, I fear, with my poor husband, who is kindly disposed, and is no sooner seated with his boon companions at a City board than he falls to and follows their gluttonous example Yet, I pray you, gentle masters, if the humours that vex him be not risen too far, do not make any incision in his head to let them out, nor even bleed him against his will, for he was especially angry with me when I spoke of such a thing, and I yet have hopes that he will recover of his own accord [*To the ALDERMAN*] Am I not right, my pet? Speak to your Ann, my love!

MASTER QUILL [L *down stage*] Calm your fears, Mistress Ann These learned doctors think of letting nothing out, but rather of letting nothing in

ANN Ah, gentlemen, how I rejoice to hear that assurance of your purpose, for I have heard there are some men who once being bled cannot contain themselves, nor can their physicians stanch the flow that issues from them, but they shrivel like parchment and fall into a stupor, so that none knows whether they be alive or dead Pray do not think that I reflect upon your skill, good masters, that I would not for the world, and I am sure you know best what is to be done for my poor husband

ALDERMAN [*seizes her and thrusts her aside, L C, then*

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE

he goes C and cries] Yes, indeed they know best! Your potion, good masters, for the love of heaven! Your potion! *to drug*

ANN What is he saying? What potion is this?

MASTER JULEP [R C] Madam, you have most happily persuaded your husband to undertake his cure

ALDERMAN Your potion, your potion!

[*Sits on chair C in front of table*

MASTER SUNDER [*coming to ALDERMAN's side*] It is here, Master Alderman! Bring me the phial, Master Ounce

[*MASTER OUNCE brings the phial*

Pray open your lips, your Worship! So! So!

[*The ALDERMAN drinks A prolonged silence*

MASTER JULEP [R C] Is your task of healing finished, Master Sunder?

MASTER SUNDER It is finished, honoured master

MASTER JULEP O divine Aesculapius, begetter of all wise physicians, let us praise thy name!

MASTER OUNCE O learned Dioscorides, master of the roots and herbs, let us praise thy name!

MASTER SUNDER O health-giving Hippocrates, O great Galenus, let us praise thy name!

[*One after another the faculty cross to R of stage, where they stand in line*

ANN [L C, gazing at the ALDERMAN] Do I see my husband smile upon me? Oh, masters, what happy change have you wrought in him? John, my darling, my love, are you now yourself again? Are you not glad to hear me speak to you? Are you not grateful to the wise physicians who loosened my tongue for me, and now have banished your own distemper? Will you not look at me? Why do you sit and smile without a word? Are you not listening?

[*She peers into the ALDERMAN's face*

MASTER JULEP Madam, he is in a state of most enviable surdity

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MASTER SUNDER Indeed, he is deafer than you were dumb

ANN [turning to MASTER QUILL, *L. of stage*] Oh, Master Quill, what have they done to my husband?

MASTER QUILL Mistress Ann, his Worship's ears are sealed to the world

ANN I will soon open them for him! [She shouts in the ALDERMAN'S ear] John, you need not try to deceive your wife! This is some jest of yours, but it is very ill-timed, let me tell you! Remember we have guests in the house, who must be entertained! Do not smile so foolishly! Cease that twirling of your thumbs and answer me!

[A long pause, during which the ALDERMAN continues to smile and twirl his thumbs.

ALDERMAN All is blissful silence! [softly]

ANN John, tell me you are not deaf! Masters, must I speak in vain? Ah, cruel husband, cruel doctors! Rogues and villains, I will have the law on you! Nay, these hands shall make their mark upon your faces!

[She crosses to them with upraised hands

MASTER JULEP Hold her fast, masters!

[MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE seize ANN. Hold her, I say! [He goes to R. of the ALDERMAN] And now, Master Alderman, I have but to mention the small matter of my fee Ahem! Do you not hear me?

[A silence The faculty look at one another

MASTER QUILL Master Julep, unhappily his Worship cannot follow the drift of your request

[He goes to L. of the ALDERMAN.

MASTER JULEP He follows it well enough! Master Alderman, for the double boon I have conferred my fee is forty pounds

ALDERMAN [looking in front of him, with a contented air] I can hear nothing

MASTER JULEP [threateningly] You will oblige me by paying it forthwith!

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE

ALDERMAN I am deaf! [MASTER JULEP *shouts in his ear*]
MASTER JULEP My fee, my fee! Come, Master Sunder,
yours is the more potent vocal organ! *bowing*

[He withdraws R C, and makes way for MASTER SUNDER, who leaves ANN and advances to the ALDERMAN'S side, followed by MASTER OUNCE]

MASTER SUNDER [bellowing]. Our fee, Master Alderman,
our fee!

MASTER OUNCE [in his shrill voice] Our fee, our fee!

ALDERMAN [still looking before him]. Heaven be praised,
all is stillness!

[ANN, released by the two doctors on the R of the stage, now rushes to the C and disperses them again. She thrusts the faculty to the R C, and herself goes L of the ALDERMAN and screams in his ear]

ANN Wretch, trickster, renegade, turncoat, Judas, monster!

THE THREE DOCTORS [in a crescendo of threats and outcries] Our fee! Pay us, Master Alderman! We claim our fee! Our fee! Our fee!

ALDERMAN The world is hushed!

ANN AND THE DOCTORS [in unison] Oh! Oh! The rogue! The traitor! Oh!

[They close in upon the ALDERMAN, and begin belabouring him and one another] MASTER QUILL comes down stage C and addresses the audience

MASTER QUILL Now it is time for a man of prudence to quit the scene And so, good masters and mistresses, here ends the comedy of *The Dumb Wife of Cheapside*, whose players are your dutiful servants.

CURTAIN

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

By RALPH S. WALKER

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

JOHN HEMMINGS
HARRY CONDELL
SAMUEL GILBURNE
DICK BURBAGE
NAT FIELD
WILLIAM SLYE
RICHARD ROBINSON
WILL SHAKESPEARE
BEN JONSON

*in his Robert Gouge's portrait
in the British Museum*

*The scene represents the stage of the Globe Theatre in 1611.
All the characters, with the exception of Ben Jonson, bear the
actual names of members of Shakespeare's company.*

*Shakespeare should be made up to resemble the Chandos
portrait, Ben Jonson to resemble the Honthorst portrait, and
padded to appear very stout.*

NOTE "The Tempest" stands first in the Folio Edition of
Shakespeare's collected plays, published in 1623, after Shake-
speare's death, by Hemmings and Condell

THE idea of writing a play about the Elizabethan theatre has tempted many dramatists. The story of that great age—the age of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Peele, Greene, Nashe, Marlowe, Kyd, Beaumont and Fletcher, Heywood, Dekker, and Massinger, to mention but a few—is full of inspiration. Within recent years we have had Miss Clemence Dane's "Will Shakespeare," Mr Emlyn Williams's "Spring 1600," the Hon. Maurice Baring's "The Rehearsal," and several others. In "Spring 1600" one saw only a momentary glimpse of the great dramatist during the performance of "Twelfth Night"; in "The Rehearsal" one saw him at work in the revision of "Macbeth"; and in "The Great Globe Itself" the author has been bold enough to speculate on the production of "The Tempest".

This is Mr Walker's first experiment in play-writing, but it will be evident that he has made a thorough study not only of the theory of dramatic composition, but of the history of the spacious times when the creation of masterpieces was merely an incident for daily gossip!

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF¹

SCENE In the centre at the back of the stage is a curtained recess, with a balcony above it to represent the Elizabethan 'back stage'. Inside the recess is a small table, with a chess-board and a box of chessmen on it and two chairs. The centre of the stage is bare, but round the sides there are some chairs. R F a chair, at the back, R of arch, a large chair, with a stool beside it, at the back, L of arch, a chair, with a few scene-location boards slung loosely across it (the scenes should not be from "The Tempest"), on the left side, half-way up stage, a chair. There is a pile of papers at back, L of arch, and on the right side up stage is a large property-chest containing an old cloak and the donkey's head used in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". At right, front of stage, propped against side-curtain, are one or two more location-boards set sideways with "A Sea-coast in Bohemia" uppermost.

The curtains of the recess are open when the play begins

Entrances R front, R back, and L back

Music for songs by Purcell and Arne—but they should be sung unaccompanied and the repetitions omitted

As the curtain rises HEMMINGS enters R F hurriedly, followed in a more leisurely way by CONDELL. Speaking over his right shoulder to CONDELL, who stands down C, he enters the recess and goes behind the table. He sets out the chessmen on the board, leaning over the table to speak to CONDELL.

HEMMINGS Third rehearsal, Condell, and I wish I could say they even knew their words. Especially in

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to the author, Mr Ralph S. Walker, c/o Messrs George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 182 High Holborn, London. W.C. 1

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the first act. It's hopeless, quite hopeless! But you know what Burbage is nowadays—won't learn his lines if he doesn't like them.

CONDELL. He's getting old, Hemmings. He won't admit it, but he knows it

HEMMINGS. And Will's so positive Listens to advice, but doesn't take it One must admit he's often been right in the past, but this is something utterly new None of us knows quite what to make of the play. I'm worried about it, I tell you

[*He comes out of the recess, draws the curtains, and comes down L of CONDELL* 

CONDELL It'll take a good deal to shake my faith in Will He's never failed us yet. And yet—he can't go on for ever! That's true Hemmings, I'm glad I'm better in time to come to a rehearsal before you go too far with it I've always flattered myself I'm rather a good judge of a play And I know what the public wants. Didn't I say *King Lear* was worth putting on?

HEMMINGS We all knew that would go down well Don't be ridiculous! There was a play now! Some noise about it—action—excitement—blood! But this new thing I don't know Burbage doesn't like it

CONDELL I know. Met him on the Bankside as I came along.

HEMMINGS It's time he was here It's time we got started. Well, what did he say about it?

CONDELL Said it was a—trifle—downcome—a "mere dotage"

HEMMINGS I wonder? I tell you what it is, Condell Will's past his prime Like you and me They all write themselves out sooner or later There's old Ben Jonson! In the Queen's day he could fill the house with the best of them Now he writes the dreariest drivel and flies into a passion when the groundlings scribble insulting messages and fling them on the stage

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

SAMUEL GILBURNE enters R back, opens chest, and rummages in it. He takes out donkey's head, and, happening to become interested in what HEMMINGS is saying, is still holding it by one ear when he comes forward to interrupt

CONDELL Yes, and comforts himself by swearing there are no plays like them, and most compassionately pities the whole world because it hasn't the wits to see how good they are!

[He chuckles]

HEMMINGS Will isn't what he was—

GILBURNE [coming forward C and interrupting] No, that he's not! You remember when he had the old Queer choking and stamping at Sir John in Henry Four? Choking, she was, and stamping—aye, and purple in the face! At Sir John, she said it was, but if I hadn't played up as second messenger, where would the play have been? [He turns his thumbs down solemnly] Condell, you remember my entry? [He goes up stage and takes a dramatic pose] Meanwhile CONDELL is mildly amused, but HEMMINGS is becoming very impatient] "My lord, prepare, the king comes on apace" I hadn't any more words, but I fancy I put more spirit into those few than some who had more I saw the Queen.

[He is mumbling on with elaborate gestures when HEMMINGS interrupts. Seeing that no one is paying any attention to him, he wanders disconsolately back to the property-chest, puts away the donkey's head, takes out the cloak, which, after his next interruption, he begins to mend with needle and thread, sitting on the chest]

HEMMINGS It's time we started. It's very late. We ought to run over the troublesome bits first. When I think of that first act! A new piece too!

CONDELL I'm curious to read this novelty. Have you my script? I'll read it now, and learn some of my

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

[HEMMINGS goes back and rummages among the papers at rear

But, Hemmings, if you think it such a risk, why not play one of the old favourites again?

GILBURNE [coming out C] Ah, that's what I say I remember when we did Macbeth I was third murderer You never saw such acting It was like this

[He is beginning to act it when HEMMINGS, having found the script, comes down to CONDELL, pushing him out of the way]

HEMMINGS [handing script to CONDELL, who turns over the pages] An old favourite! Man, this is not a catchpenny piece designed to please the mob alone! Haven't you heard? Didn't Burbage tell you? This is a royal command performance for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth An old favourite! It has to be new—"fire-new," Will says

GILBURNE [sitting on chest] Aye, maybe. But what pleased the old Queen should please the young Princess. Cackling she was, as if she'd laid an egg [Putting down cloak and coming forward gesticulating] And when I came on as second messenger

[He goes on for a little, but nobody looks, and CONDELL interrupts him]

CONDELL. What does Master Benjamin Jonson, our bricklaying friend, say to this favour given to Will in preference to himself?

HEMMINGS Will said he was going to invite the old fellow down to see a rehearsal If he should come and we in this state! Ben's a harsh critic [Going over L and turning when BURBAGE enters] But I hardly think he will come More likely to sulk over it

actor [Enter BURBAGE R front, and coming over C, followed by SLYE and FIELD]

Now, Burbage, why can't we get started?

BURBAGE I won't do it, John I won't do it This is

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the silliest stuff [Slapping his script histrionically] This Prospero, now, where's my opportunity in a part like that? Haven't I made Will Shakespeare's name for him? Where would he be but for my Hamlet, my Othello, my Lear? And haven't I a right to say what I'm to act? What would this company be but for me? This command performance comes to it—why? Because Dick Burbage plays the lead in it. If I don't like the leading part surely that's enough to condemn the whole thing!

[CONDELL, shrugging his shoulders, goes up to chair L of arch, and settles down to read script

SLYE [coming forward] Burbage is right, Hemmings Will's given him another old man's part—and it's only reasonable he should, for Dick's too old now for a part like Hamlet or Othello—

BURBAGE Old! I'll play you Hamlet to-morrow, but this Prospero—

SLYE But what's wrong about this old man is that there's no fire about him. Will always said we "strutted and fretted" too much, but where would the door receipts have been if we'd listened to him? Now he's cut out all chance of a little really Fine Acting!

BURBAGE I don't mind playing an old man like Lear, with a chance to let yourself go now and then with a

"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout!" [Ranting.]

Or a bit of pathos:

"Pray, do not mock me
I am a very foolish fond old man" [There is "I" written above "fond old man"] [Very sentimentally.]

But this Prospero's no good. No Passion! No Pathos!

GILBURNE Ah, now you're speaking! That was a play, that was! [Coming C behind the group] Regan killed me, you remember, Condell. Like this it was

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[He acts elaborately, falling as if stabbed, and rising stiffly and with much difficulty to find that nobody has been paying any attention to him, while HEMMINGS is speaking.

HEMMINGS. I tell you, Dick, we must put something new on the boards for the wedding. Whatever this play may not be, Dick, it's new, isn't it? Now, this first act. Let me see [Turning over pages] Where on earth is Robinson?

FIELD Why should Robinson play Miranda? I did Cordelia, Hemmings [Much aggrieved] Why shouldn't I do Miranda?

HEMMINGS Your voice is breaking, Nat, and you've grown too ugly. You can't play women's parts for ever. Now, for heaven's sake, let's start! And, Dick, even if we can persuade Will to write another we must go on with this till he does.

BURBAGE It won't do. It's children's stuff. No passion! No Pathos!

HEMMINGS Now, let me see [Looking over script again] There's Prospero's long speech to Miranda. You've hardly had a chance to try that over. We must run through it. Now, Burbage.

[BURBAGE and GILBURNE move down the big chair to C of stage, and GILBURNE sets the stool at the right side of it. He then goes back to his sewing on the chest. —as x 12]

And where is that dirty little scoundrel?

ROBINSON. Here I am. And not so much of the "dirty" when you address your leading lady!

[SLYE moves chair at R a little forward and sits down. FIELD, standing beside him, expresses contempt for ROBINSON]

HEMMINGS You're late! You ought to have your skirt on! But there's no time now. You must change

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later on Let's get on We'll take the exposition scene —the one after the shipwreck You do it worst of all : Miranda is upset because she thinks lives have been lost in the storm Prospero, take from "Wipe thou thine eyes" ^{for d}

BURBAGE I will not rehearse this scene unless I have a guarantee that this brat will not snore in the middle, as he did last time

HEMMINGS He won't. And if he does——

BURBAGE Well, well Can't say I know this bit Don't like it "Thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter" —no—yes [Changing his character to that of Prospero, he speaks tenderly at first] "Wipe thou thine eyes, have comfort" ^{mu}

[ROBINSON immediately wipes his eyes, and FIELD imitates him in mockery, calling SLYE's attention to him

HEMMINGS No, no, no ! Don't wipe them at once, like that. Wait, wait !

BURBAGE "The direful spectacle of the wreck, which touch'd

The very virtue of compassion in thee" —hm, ha , let's see—

"I have with such provision in mine art
So safely ordered that there is no soul—

No, not much so . . ." [Testily] Not so much what, Hemmings

HEMMINGS [looking on script] "Not so much perdition"

BURBAGE [beginning to rant and rising in a crescendo] "No, not so much perdition as an hair

Betid to any creature——"

HEMMINGS Softly, softly, there You are forgetting. No prating You must console her in gentle tones.

[ROBINSON is laughing at BURBAGE, calling SLYE's attention to him by pointing with his thumb over his shoulder FIELD at the same time exchanges

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defiances with ROBINSON, who consequently misses the cue to sit down

BURBAGE Aye, what did I say? This part gives one no opportunities.

"No, not so much perdition as an hair
Betid to any creature in the vessel [speaking gently]
Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink
Sit down . . . sit down . . ." [Furiously] SIT DOWN,
will you?

[BURBAGE sits in chair C., ROBINSON on stool at his right FIELD sits down on SLYE's right, and imitates mockingly the movements and expressions of Miranda The group in the centre is thus reproduced ironically on the right.

'Sit down,
For thou must now know farther"

HEMMINGS [pacing over to extreme L forward]. A poor introduction to the exposition! Will must alter this.

[Turning] Now, Robinson

ROBINSON "You have often
Begun to tell me what I am, but stopp'd . ."
Jove, Hemmings, that's true! He has often begun and often stopped!

BURBAGE [enraged] You . . . I'll . . .

[He makes a dive at ROBINSON, who, jumping up, evades him

HEMMINGS [angrily] Sit down, Robinson, sit down and hold your tongue

[ROBINSON sits and, putting out his tongue, holds it between his fingers with deliberation and impudence

"But stopp'd and left me . . ." Go on, you!

ROBINSON How can I when I'm holding my tongue?
[BURBAGE threatens him

'And left me to a bootless inquisition, ^{angry}
Concluding— [as if he had forgotten what follows]
'Stay. not yet'"

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

BURBAGE. Go on, then, puppy, finish it . . . finish it.
Who's stopping now?

ROBINSON. That's all I have finished
"Concluding, 'Stay not yet'"

HEMMINGS [*who has been very impatient*] Oh, how shall
we ever be done at this rate! That's your cue, Burbage

BURBAGE Oh . . . hm . . . I mistook the sense.
Let me see, yes

"Canst thou remember [*speaking gently*]
A time before we came unto this cell?
I do not think thou canst for then thou wast not
Out three years old" [*Indignantly*] And, by heaven, I
doubt if you're much older yet, you squirt, to judge by
your behaviour!

HEMMINGS [*distractedly*] There must be no interpolations
How on earth are we to get through this
rehearsal? How on earth are we to be ready in time?
Now, after "canst thou remember"

ROBINSON "Certainly, sir, I can"

[FIELD is mocking his speeches

BURBAGE "By what? by any other house or person?
Of any thing the image tell me that
Hath kept with thy remembrance"

ROBINSON [*scowling at FIELD and forgetting to act Miranda*]
" 'Tis far off

And rather like a dream than an assurance
That my remembrance warrants—"

HEMMINGS That's not it! A far-away look when
you speak those lines, as if you were trying hard to recall
something What's wrong with you all? This re-
hearsal's a farce! How can I help it if you don't like
the play?

FIELD [*bursting out and jumping to his feet*] Hemmings,
he can't do it I tell you, he's no use Now, let me
show you how it should be done

" 'Tis far off "

[*His voice is too deep.*

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ROBINSON [jumping up, shouting and speaking very rapidly to drown FIELD'S words]. " 'Tis far-off

And-rather-like-a-dream-than-an-assurance
That-my-remembrance-warrants Had I not
Four or five women once that tended me?"

HEMMINGS It can't possibly be done like that! We
must have a special rehearsal of those lines. That'll
never do—never do Be quiet, Field.

[FIELD, who has been expostulating with SLYE, subsides again on the floor, and ROBINSON sits down

BURBAGE "Thou hast, and more, Miranda . . ."
Is that right, Hemmings? What did he want with
more? [HEMMINGS nods impatiently

"But how is it

That this lives in thy mind? What seest thou else
In the dark backward and abyss of time?"

ROBINSON. "But that I do not"

BURBAGE. "Twelve years since, Miranda, twelve years
since,

Thy father was the Duke of Milan and
A prince of power [impressively and with dignity].
My brother and thy uncle, call'd Antonio—
I pray thee, mark me—that a brother should
Be so perfidious!—he whom next thyself
Of all the world I loved and to him put

[ROBINSON, leaning head on right hand, pretends to
be falling asleep, which distracts BURBAGE

The manage of my state"—hm, ha—"as at that time
[kicking ROBINSON] Through all the signories"—how
does it go?—"it was the first [with great dignity].
And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed
In dignity, and for the liberal arts

[CONDELL, preoccupied with script, laughs suddenly,
disconcerting BURBAGE, who regains solemnity on
seeing CONDELL unaware of what is happening.

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

In dignity, and for the liberal arts
Without a parallel, those—”

[ROBINSON snores very loudly] There is an uproar
ROBINSON jumps up and runs round back of chair
to L, pursued by BURBAGE SLYE and FIELD
jump and run after them, GILBURNE following
BURBAGE shouts, “I’ll stand it no longer! An
impudent pup!” FIELD shouts to HEMMINGS,
who looks on helplessly from extreme L forward,
“You see how it is, Hemmings He’s no good!”
HEMMINGS wails “Robinson, Burbage, will you
sit down?” CONDELL still immersed in back-
ground At the height of the hubbub enter
SHAKESPEARE R back, followed by BEN JONSON
A yell from ROBINSON, who holds his face,
shouting, “Ow, my nose! It’s bleeding!”
They stop when SHAKESPEARE speaks, ROBIN-
SON, L centre forward, held by SLYE, BURBAGE,
centre, held by GILBURNE and FIELD, looking
threateningly at ROBINSON

SHAKESPEARE [L centre] Hullo, Hemmings, what’s
this? A rehearsal of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*? Dick
Burbage complains to me that my play gives no chance
to exhibit passion or pathos—but here we have both
Passion [indicating BURBAGE] and Pathos [indicating ROBIN-
SON] very well acted!

HEMMINGS This pestiferous brat, whose bleeding nose
is only what he deserves, persists in snoring when
Burbage is in the middle of his long exposition speech

SHAKESPEARE Perhaps it is too long A good idea,
though! Miranda shall fall asleep during that scene,
instead of later. But we’ll cut the snoring, Robinson!
Now go and cure that bleeding nose, and we’ll wait

[They all go out R back, except SHAKESPEARE, BEN
JONSON, and CONDELL, who looked up during
the disturbance, but now resumes his reading]

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

BEN JONSON [coming down R centre to SHAKESPEARE, now down L centre] Good God, man, is that the way to write a play? Will, I've given you good advice many a time which you haven't taken, and now—a piece of fooling by a silly boy—

SHAKESPEARE I've always valued your advice, Ben—

BEN JONSON But never taken it! [Catching sight of scene-location board from "Winter's Tale" and brandishing it] You wouldn't have made a fool of yourself by laying a scene on the sea-coast of Bohemia if you'd taken my advice to verify your facts Any ignorant choir-boy knows Bohemia has no sea-coast!

SHAKESPEARE I altered those lines in *Julius Caesar* you objected to, Ben

BEN JONSON "Caesar did never wrong without just cause"—ho, ho Will, you altered two lines I wish you'd altered a thousand You'll never make a dramatist! But this masque of yours, I want to see it. Who should know more about masques than I? Haven't I written dozens? For kings and queens I shouldn't like to repeat what the old Queen said of me Why, Will, she called me her "paragon" And the King too! Well, well, it seems the old days are over Modern taste is all for trash—trash and piffle—and when they want a Court masque they pass their old "paragon" by

SHAKESPEARE Well, this isn't exactly a masque, Ben

BEN JONSON Isn't a masque? Then what in thunder is it? Isn't it to be performed before the Court at a royal wedding?

SHAKESPEARE It's rather different, Ben This is to be acted by our own company, by the Lord Chamberlain's command, not by the lords and ladies of the Court, as your masques were

BEN JONSON. Hum I should hope not Isn't exactly a masque? Now, that's just like you, Will. None of your plays is exactly anything No dramatic

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

theory behind them—nothing solid Ephemeral, popular stuff, Will—won't last Your tragedies, so called, aren't tragedies They're full of stupid monkey-play and chatter between clowns Look at the grave-diggers in your *Hamlet*, and the porter in *Macbeth*—and the fool in that farrago of nonsense *King Lear* Crazy modern notions! Now, if this thing of yours isn't a masque, what is it?

SHAKESPEARE I don't know It's a sort of fantasy ^{in D} a kind of "musical comedy" I haven't a name for it yet Never can think of titles What do they matter, after all? You know, in the end I have to leave it at *As You Like It* or *All's Well that Ends Well*, or something equally feeble I got the idea for this one from a Spanish novel— ^{in D} ~~unwritten~~

BEN JONSON Bah! There you are again with your love-reading Vulgar modern stuff! What does Horace say? Make the classics your models. You're content to plagiarize the worst of the moderns It isn't only vulgar it's dishonest ^{in C}

SHAKESPEARE What's the harm in plagiarizing an idea? All ideas are common property, Ben Who was it said the other day that Catullus wrote "Drink to me only with thine eyes" I said, "No, that's Ben's" —and I meant it

BEN JONSON Who said that? Who was it? Was it Marston? Was it Dekker? I'll see him I tell you, Will, "great minds think alike," and Catullus is a classic But you, you write your plays round modern rot Bah! I could have made a dramatist of you, Will— ^[At this point CONDELL, preoccupied with the script of "The Tempest," laughs suddenly and very heartily, disconcerting BEN Seeing CONDELL unaware of him, he goes on] —but you preferred to hear the mob applaud Now, what's the result? My plays will stand scrutiny, they'll live when at last a generation is born to appreciate the scholarly and

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

~~guyard~~, Did I tell you I'm publishing them shortly as a collected edition of my works? [CONDELL looks up and listens] Yours aren't worth printing, though they do fetch the crowd.

CONDELL [coming a pace or two forward] Will, why don't you publish yours? An authentic edition of them all. It would take the wind out of the pirate-publishers' sails, if nothing else ^{every} ~~and~~ ^{great} ~~small~~ ^{shakes}

SHAKESPEARE Well, you see, I don't claim to write works, Harry, like Ben I only write plays! I don't care whether "future generations" read them or not, so long as they serve our turn here on the stage of the Globe To tell you the truth, I rather think I've lost some of them! ^{is that people may not see them}

[HEMMINGS bustles in R back, followed by BURBAGE ^{as Prospero, wearing magician's cloak,} and ROBINSON, now dressed as Miranda All ready, Hemmings? [CONDELL goes back to his reading] Ben's not going to be easily satisfied, I see, so we'll have to do the best we can if we're to please him!

BEN JONSON [going to property-chest and sitting on it] Come on, then Let's see this "fantasy," this 'what-is-it' of yours.

HEMMINGS. Gouge has come at last and is changing, so if he's ready we can take it from the entrance of Ariel, who's supposed to be invisible, followed by Ferdinand.

[BURBAGE sits on chair C, ROBINSON on stool sleeping] SHAKESPEARE sits on chair L HEMMINGS goes back to speak to him when GOUGHE enters

That scene goes better than the last, thank goodness! [Shouting] Are you ready there, Gouge, Field?

[Enter GOUGHE R forward as Ariel, looking back and beckoning Moving across to L, he sings.

GOUGHE "Come unto these yellow sands,
And then take hands

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

Curtsied when you have and kiss'd
The wild waves whist,
Foot it feately here and there,
And, sweet sprites, the burthen bear"

[FIELD enters R forward, wearing sword, looking about him in a bemused way, and stands R front

FIELD "Where should this music be? i' the air or the earth?"

It sounds no more. and, sure, it waits upon
Some god o' the island Sitting on a bank,
Weeping again the king my father's wreck,
This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air thence have I follow'd it,
Or it hath drawn me rather But 'tis gone.
No, it begins again"

During this speech GOUGHE runs lightly over to peer up laughingly at FIELD, then, making a gesture implying silence to BURBAGE, he runs back L and sings

GOUGHE "Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made,

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

Nothing of him that doth fade

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange.

Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell Ding-dong.

Hark! now I hear them,—Ding-dong, bell"

FIELD "The ditty does remember my drown'd father
This is no mortal business, nor no sound

That the earth owes I hear it now above me"

BURBAGE [to Miranda] "The fringed curtains of thine eye advance

And say what thou seest yond"

ROBINSON [looking up, incredulous] "What is't? a spirit?"

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Lord, how it looks about ! Believe me, sir,
It carries a brave form But 'tis a spirit" [Rising.
BURBAGE. "No, wench, it eats and sleeps and hath
such senses

As we have, such This gallant which thou seest
Was in the wreck, and, but he's something stain'd
With grief that's beauty's canker, thou mightst call him
A goodly person : he hath lost his fellows
And stays about to find 'em"

ROBINSON. "I might call him
A thing divine, for nothing natural
I ever saw so noble"

[BURBAGE turns L to make his aside to Ariel, and
there is by-play, unseen, between FIELD and
ROBINSON ROBINSON, suddenly emerging from
the character of Miranda, puts fingers to nose
at FIELD from behind BURBAGE's chair, while
FIELD scowls and threatens him with hand and
foot As BURBAGE stops speaking they in-
stantly resume their characters

BURBAGE [aside] "It goes on, I see,
As my soul prompts it Spirit, fine spirit ! I'll free
thee
Within two days for this"

[GOUGHE goes out L back, skipping and dancing
FIELD "Most sure, the goddess
On whom these airs attend ! [Kneeling] Vouchsafe my
prayer

May know if you remain upon this island,
And that you will some good instruction give
How I may bear me here my prime request,
Which I do last pronounce, is, O you wonder !
If you be maid or no ?"

ROBINSON. "No wonder, sir ;

But certainly a maid"

"O, if a virgin,

FIELD

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And your affection not gone forth, I'll make you
The queen of Naples ”

BURBAGE “ Soft, sir ! one word more

[FIELD gets up and starts back

I charge thee

That thou attend me thou dost here usurp
The name thou owest not , and hast put thyself
Upon this island as a spy, to win it
From me, the lord on’t ”

FIELD “ No, as I am a man ”

ROBINSON “ There’s nothing ill can dwell in such a
temple

If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
Good things will strive to dwell with’t ”

BURBAGE [as if going off L] “ Follow me.
Speak not you for him , he’s a traitor Come ,
I’ll manacle thy neck and feet together
Sea-water shalt thou drink , thy food shall be
The fresh-brook muscles, wither’d roots, and husks
Wherein the acorn cradled Follow ”

FIELD “ No ,

I will resist such entertainment till
Mine enemy has more power ”

[He starts forward towards BURBAGE, who makes a
pass at him, so that when he has drawn his sword
he is charmed from moving

ROBINSON [going over to BURBAGE] “ O, dear father—— ”

BEN JONSON [rising and coming R forward] Will, Will,
this is stupid, tedious stuff ! A fairy-tale ! Are all the
inhabitants of London turned to mewling infants that
this sort of milk and water should be offered them ?

[GILBURNE looks in to see what has happened
and finds CONDELL making as if to protest, but BURBAGE
interrupts CONDELL goes on reading

BURBAGE Ben’s right, Will It’s not good enough
I tell you, you can’t write a play without Passio——

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

HEMMINGS [*interrupting*] Don't you think an old-fashioned tragedy would have been safer, Will? This ultra-modern comedy stuff—you don't know what to make of it. Tragedy's safer

BEN JONSON D'you call this thing a comedy, Hemmings? By Plautus and Terence, I don't! Will can't write comedy any more than he can tragedy! He'll never make a dramatist till he listens to Aristotle—and if I've said so once I've said it a hundred times Look at your *Antony and Cleopatra*, now—more than forty changes of scene—Rome one moment, Egypt the next! It's against all reason!

GILBURNE [*pushing forward*] Antony and Cleopatra ^{was a good play} Now, that was something like a play I was playing one of the messengers, you remember, Will, Hemmings "Fulvia, thy wife is dead!" like this . . .

[He continues to act, but nobody pays any attention to him]

SHAKESPEARE Why should Aristotle write my plays?
He's been dead eighteen hundred years!

BEN JONSON And look at your very latest production—your what d'you call it? Winter's Tale, and—what's the other?

GILBURNE [*taking heart again*] Winter's Tale? Aye, there, now [He gets no further this time]

BEN JONSON *Pericles* In both of them the story spreads over nearly twenty years!

[FIELD and ROBINSON, not being interested in this, but more concerned with their own argument, go off R back BURBAGE and HEMMINGS talking rather heatedly on L, BURBAGE putting a case and HEMMINGS apparently disclaiming responsibility rather helplessly]

You get worse and worse All this modern craze for variety, sensation, fantastic impossibilities! You wouldn't take advice, and now what's the result? Your

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

plays are pantomimes only fit for apprentices and serving-girls !

SHAKESPEARE I really don't care a fig for Aristotle and your 'unities,' Ben, but after all the badgering I've had about them over at the Mermaid just for a joke I've kept the rules this time ! In my new play the scene never shifts from Prospero's island, and the whole action takes place inside twenty-four hours. What do you say to that, Ben ? Reforming in my old age ?

BEN JONSON Hum, well—it takes more than observing the unities to write a good play I never said that was everything

BURBAGE [*coming over*] Aye, Will What we want is a tragedy A blood-curdler Something with pace about it Something fierce and furious Something to make them slobber with pity one moment and set their spines on edge with fear the next

GILBURNE Aye, when I think how the ladies screamed at *Titus* I don't think Will's done anything like it since, and that was long ago Still, I think I gave them a scare as third murderer in *Macbeth* Dick was standing there, you remember, Will, and I came on—

[He is interrupted, and at last goes back to his chest, shaking his head, and takes up his sewing]

BEN JONSON Melodrama ! Melodrama, man ! Do you call that Jeronimo stuff tragedy ? But, Will, if this were a comedy I'd ask nothing better of you—but this thing of yours hasn't even the seriousness of comedy. What's the meaning ? What's the moral ? Now, what is the story ?

SHAKESPEARE I don't think it has a moral I don't think any of my plays have I'm not a preacher or a teacher The story's this, though I hope you won't judge any play of mine by its plot This Prospero is by rights the Duke of Milan, but his brother Antonio, with the help of Alonso, the King of Naples, has ousted him

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

and banished him with his infant daughter Miranda. Landing on an uninhabited island, he has studied magic for years and obtained power over two creatures—Ariel, an airy spirit, and Caliban, a brutal, loutish monster. When my play begins his magic causes a tempest and a shipwreck to bring Antonio, along with the King of Naples and his son Ferdinand, to the island. Well, Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love, as Prospero intends, and when he's reconciled with his brother he gives up magic, and they all go back to Naples. There's some amusement to be had out of Ariel and Caliban—and the shipwrecked sailors get drunk. That's a good, lively scene!

BEN JONSON Here's thin material enough!

BURBAGE Thin and watery, Will! Thin and watery! Where's the opening for me? Where's the Passion—and the Pathos?

HEMMINGS Well, I don't know—can't say. For want of anything better we ought to make the most of what we have.* How can we rehearse with all these interruptions?

FIELD [suddenly putting his head through the curtain at back] Before we start I should like to ask Mr Shakespeare, and Mr Jonson too, one question. It is this: Why should this fellow Robinson, who is obviously no use at all, play Miranda, when every one knows I—

[ROBINSON is heard laughing inside the curtain, and HEMMINGS, who has been very impatient, shouts as FIELD'S head disappears]

HEMMINGS No more of that now, Nat! Burbage, if you don't like the play you can, at least, act your part. [He turns over pages] We ought to rehearse Act Five. I think all those that have a part in it are here? Let me see. There's Alonso, the king, that's myself, and Condell is to do the usurping brother. If you don't know your lines you must read them, Condell.

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

CONDELL Oh, I think I can remember them I've only half a dozen words! But I've been reading the play through, and my opinion is—

HEMMINGS No more opinions, now, for heaven's sake! How shall we be ready in time? You're doing the bos'n, of course, Will—and Slye and Gilburne are the drunken sailors Where is Slye? Slye! [Enter SLYE R. forward] Slye, where's Samuel Cross? He should be here to-night.

SLYE Why, Hemmings, Sam got a rap on the head with a bludgeon last night in the 'prentices' brawl in Fish Street He isn't out of bed to-day Didn't you know?

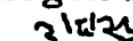
HEMMINGS [distracted] What next, what next? What are we to do? He never sent me word I haven't a substitute Now, who's to do the part of Caliban?

SHAKESPEARE Why, Ben will read Caliban! Won't you, Ben?

[CONDELL beckons BURBAGE over, indicates BEN, and laughs]

BEN JONSON What is this—Caliban?

[HEMMINGS gives him his script.]

SHAKESPEARE He's the monster. 

[At this there is covert amusement.]

BEN JONSON I don't mind reading the part to help you out But, Will, I hope there's nothing personal intended here Monster? You've not made a caricature of me, like Dekker or Marston, to make a mock of me in public, since you can't gainsay my arguments in private? If you've done that—

SHAKESPEARE I never use my plays to express personal spite—you know that, Ben I leave that to Dekker and Marston

[When the difficulty as to who shall do Caliban's part has been cleared up SLYE goes back to GILBURNE, who is on the property-chest, and they both go out R. back]

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

BEN JONSON Well, you mustn't expect me to act I'm no actor, though I tried acting when I was younger and greener. Acting does a dramatist no good Actor-playwrights have vulgarized the stage—you and your like, Will. I shall simply read the words

HEMMINGS Come, let's get started—let's begin This is the situation, Ben. Alonso, the King of Naples, that's me, and Antonio, Prospero's brother, that's Condell [*he shows CONDELL where to stand beside L C*], have been put under a spell by Prospero We haven't seen him yet, but we're beginning to come out of our trance. Will, your entrance will be there [*pointing L back*] Now, Dick.

[They assume their characters, behaving as if drowsily emerging from a stupor BURBAGE standing R. of C up stage. BEN JONSON sitting on the chest SHAKESPEARE goes off L back, to be ready for his entrance.

BURBAGE “ Their understanding Begins to swell, and the approaching tide Will shortly fill the reasonable shore That now lies foul and muddy Not one of them That yet looks on me, or would know me : Ariel, Fetch me the hat and rapier in my cell

[GOUGHE runs out when called, fetches hat, rapier, and shoulder-cloak from recess C, and returns.
I will discase me, and myself present As I was sometime Milan . quickly, spirit , Thou shalt ere long be free ”

GOUGHE [running down R., while BURBAGE puts on his things, sings]

“ Where the bee sucks, there suck I :
In a cowslip's bell I lie ,
There I couch when owls do cry,
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily,

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

Merrily, merrily shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough ”

[*He goes back to help BURBAGE put his things straight.*

BURBAGE “ Why that’s my dainty Ariel ! I shall miss
thee ,

But yet thou shalt have freedom so, so, so.
To the King’s ship, invisible as thou art
There shalt thou find the mariners asleep
Under the hatches , the master and the boatswain
Being awake, enforce them to this place,
And presently, I prithee ”

GOUGHE “ I drink the air before me, and return
Or ere your pulse twice beat ” [He runs out L back

BURBAGE “ Behold, sir King,
The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero ”

HEMMINGS “ Whether thou be’st he or no,
Or some enchanted trifler to abuse me,
As late I have been, I not know : thy pulse
Beats as of flesh and blood · and, since I saw thee,
The affliction of my mind amends, with which,
I fear, a madness held me. . . .

But how should Prospero
Be living and be here ? ”

BURBAGE “ You do yet taste
Some subtleties o’ the isle, that will not let you
Believe things certain Welcome, my friends !
[To CONDELL] For you, most wicked sir, whom to call
brother

Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault , all of them , and require
My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know,
Thou must restore ”

HEMMINGS “ If thou be’st Prospero,
Give us particulars of thy preservation ,
How thou hast met us here, who three hours since
Were wreck’d upon this shore , where I have lost—

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

How sharp the point of this remembrance is!—
My dear son Ferdinand."

BURBAGE. "I am woe for't, sir."

HEMMINGS "Irreparable is the loss, and patience
Says it is past her cure."

BURBAGE. "I rather think
You have not sought her help, of whose soft grace
For the like loss I have her sovereign aid
And rest myself content."

HEMMINGS "You the like loss!"

BURBAGE "As great to me as late; for I
Have lost my daughter."

HEMMINGS. "A daughter?
O heavens, that they were living both in Naples,
The king and queen there! that they were, I wish
Myself were muddled in that oozy bed
Where my son lies When did you lose your daughter?"

BURBAGE "In this last tempest Know for certain
That I am Prospero and that very duke
Which was thrust forth of Milan, who most strangely
Upon this shore, where you were wrecked, was landed,
To be the lord on't. Welcome, sir;
This cell's my court: here have I few attendants
And subjects none abroad. pray you, look in
My dukedom since you have given me again,
I will requite you with as good a thing"

*[He pulls open the curtain of the back stage showing
ROBINSON R and FIELD L seated at the table
playing chess.]*

ROBINSON. "Sweet lord, you play me false."

FIELD. "No, my dear'st love,
I would not for the world"

ROBINSON. "Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should

wrangle,
And I would call it fair play."

"If this prove

HEMMINGS.

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

A vision of the Island, one dear son
Shall I twice lose ”

CONDELL “ A most high miracle ! ”

FIELD [*coming out towards HEMMINGS*]

“ Though the seas threaten, they are merciful ,
I have cursed them without cause ”

[*Kneels before CONDELL.*

HEMMINGS “ Now, all the blessings

Of a glad father compass thee about !

Arise, and say how thou camest here ”

ROBINSON “ O, wonder ! ”

How many goodly creatures are there here !

How beauteous mankind is ! O, brave new world,
That has such people in’t ”

BURBAGE “ ‘Tis new to thee ”

HEMMINGS “ What is this maid with whom thou wast
at play ? ”

Your eld’st acquaintance cannot be, three hours .

Is she the goddess that hath sever’d us,

And brought us thus together ? ”

FIELD “ Sir, she is mortal ,
But by immortal Providence, she’s mine ”

HEMMINGS “ I am hers [He then goes down L.

But, O, how oddly will it sound that I

Must ask my child forgiveness ! ”

BURBAGE. “ There, sir, stop . ”

Let us not burthen our remembrance with

A heaviness that’s gone ”

HEMMINGS [*back to audience*]. “ Give me your hands
Let grief and sorrow still embrace his heart
That doth not wish you joy ”

[*They go over and retire L half-way up stage as*
SHAKESPEARE enters, wearing cloth sash and cut-
lass, driven in by GOUGHE as Ariel, L B.

Now, blasphemy,

That swear’st grace o’erboard, not an oath on shore ?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Hast thou no mouth by land? What is the news?"

SHAKESPEARE. "The best news is, that we have safely found

Our king and company, the next, our ship—
Which, but three glasses since, we gave out split—
Is tight and yare and bravely rigg'd as when
We first put out to sea"

GOUGHE [*aside to BURBAGE*]. "Sir, all this service
Have I done since I went"

BURBAGE [*aside to GOUGHE*] "My tricksy spirit!"

[GOUGHE runs down R. forward and sits cross-legged, looking on and laughing]

HEMMINGS "These are not natural events, they
strengthen

From strange to stranger Say, how came you hither?"

SHAKESPEARE "If I did think, sir, I were well awake
I'd strive to tell you We were dead of sleep,
And—how we know not—all clapp'd under hatches,
Where but even now with strange and several noises
Of roaring, shrieking, howling, jingling chains,
And moe diversity of sounds, all horrible,
We were awaked, straightway, at liberty,
Where we, in all her trim, freshly beheld
Our royal, good and gallant ship, our master
Capering to eye her, on a trice, so please you,
Even in a dream, were we divided from them
And were brought moping hither"

[GOUGHE runs to BURBAGE

GOUGHE [*aside to BURBAGE*] "Was't well done?"

BURBAGE [*aside to GOUGHE*] "Bravely, my diligence
Thou shalt be free"

HEMMINGS "This is as strange a maze as e'er men
trod,

And there is in this business more than nature
Was ever conduct of some oracle
Must rectify our knowledge"

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

BURBAGE "Sir, my liege,
Do not infest your mind with beating on
The strangeness of this business.
Come hither, spirit [*aside*].
Set Caliban and his companions free
Untie the spell [Exit GOUGHE R. back.]
How fares my gracious sir?
There are yet missing of your company
Some few odd lads that you remember not"

[Re-enter GOUGHE, R back, as if driving in GILBURNE and SLYE, who are wearing cloths knotted over their heads. It is pointed out to BEN JONSON by SLYE that he also is to be driven in. He is very dignified, and appears to resent being hustled. He makes no attempt to act the part of Caliban]

GILBURNE "Every man shift for all the rest, and let no man take care for himself, for all is but fortune Coragio, bully-monster, coragio!"

[BEN JONSON looks indignant, and GOUGHE, unperceived, mocks him]

SLYE "If these be true spies which I wear in my head, here's a goodly sight!" Now, Ben, man, your lines

BEN JONSON What must I say? Where's the place?

Ah

"O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed!
How fine my master is! I am afraid
He will chastise me"

[He reads as if contemptuous of the words.]

BURBAGE "Mark but the badges of these men, my lords,

Then say if they be true This mis-shapen knave [indicating BEN JONSON, who withdraws angrily, causing some amusement to the others],

His mother was a witch, and one so strong
That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs,

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

And deal in her command without her power.
These three have robb'd me ; and this demi-devil—
For he's a bastard one—[BEN JONSON *appears to resent BURBAGE's words, and looks more and more incensed*] had
plotted with them

To take my life Two of these fellows you
Must know and own , this thing of darkness [pointing
again at Ben] I
Acknowledge mine ”

BEN JONSON. Will, when I offered to read these lines
I didn't suppose I was to be made a spectacle before
these fellows ! It's outrageous ! You arranged it on
purpose to flout me I'll have no more to do with it

SHAKESPEARE. Come, Ben, we're much obliged to you
for reading the part These words are spoken to
Caliban, not to you

BEN JONSON. Aye, but why did you pick me for
Caliban ? Tell me that.

SHAKESPEARE Only because Sam Cross isn't here
to-day, Ben Come on, let's finish it

HEMMINGS. We really must get on It's very late
There's barely time to finish as it is

BEN JONSON Well, hm, what am I to say now ?
“ I shall be pinch'd to death ”

HEMMINGS “ Is not this Stephano, my drunken
butler ? ”

CONDELL “ He is drunk now : where had he wine ? ”

HEMMINGS “ And Trinculo is reeling ripe . where
should they

Find this grand liquor that hath gilded 'em ?
How camest thou in this pickle ? ”

SLYE “ I have been in such a pickle since I saw you
last that, I fear me, will never out of my bones : I shall
not fear fly-blowing ”

CONDELL “ Why, how now, Stephano ? ”

[SLYE nudges him

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

GILBURNE "O, touch me not, I am not Stephano,
but a cramp"

BURBAGE "You'd be king o' the isle, sirrah?"

GILBURNE "I should have been a sore one then"

HEMMINGS [*indicating BEN JONSON*] "This is a strange
thing as e'er I look'd on" [BEN JONSON *again offended*]

BURBAGE "He is as disproportioned in his manners
As in his shape Go—^{violence}"

BEN JONSON [*furiously*] That's meant for me This
is an outrage! I'll read no more of your fairy-tale, to
be made a laughing-stock [They try to pacify him, but he
storms] I'll not hear you I tell you, I won't listen to
you I'll not stay here to be called a monster You've
gone too far! Comedy? Fairy-tale? Bah! Watery
stuff! It's all about the sea, and, if you ask me, you're
all at sea about it. It begins with a tempest, and it's
not my fault if your rehearsal ends in one! It's all
wind! Wind and water! Where's the sense of it?
Fantasy? Fish and fiddlesticks! meanings lacking

[He stumps out angrily R. forward]

SHAKESPEARE Wind and water? All at sea?
Tempest? Very well, I'll call it *The Tempest*, and let
the critics storm over it as much as they please

HEMMINGS But Will, Will, what are we to do
now?

SHAKESPEARE No more to-night We'll have the
whole cast down to-morrow and have a full rehearsal
Good night, Slye

[SLYE, GOUGHE, FIELD, and ROBINSON go out R.
back, shouting "Good night" and "Good night,
Will" GILBURNE is putting the chairs back
and closing the curtains of the back stage
CONDELL is speaking to BURBAGE earnestly,
BURBAGE looking doubtful

And, Hemmings, Ben's right on one point. A masque
would be appropriate for the Princess's wedding I had

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY.

thought of that I'm going to insert one in the fourth act.

HEMMINGS [anxiously]. Nothing too modern, Will, I hope—nothing too unusual

SHAKESPEARE. Just the usual wedding stuff Juno, Ceres, nymphs, and so forth You see, the actors can be spirits summoned up by Prospero to celebrate the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda—a last exhibition of his skill before he gives up magic for ever And I've got some lines for Dick, to follow the masque, that I'll read you now. And Dick, Harry, Sam [calling them round him—R. to L BURBAGE, GILBURNE, SHAKESPEARE, CONDELL, HEMMINGS], as I wrote them I thought—this Prospero might be me. I'm getting on, you know. We're all growing old. I don't think I'll ever write another play.

BURBAGE What, Will? There's life in us all yet!

CONDELL Not write any more, Will? Why, whatever Dick, or Ben, or Sam here, says, you're doing your best work now!

GILBURNE Will's right The old plays were the best When I think of *Titus* now, or *Timon*, or *Richard Three*, or *Henry Four*! And the old Queen laughing fit to burst her stays at Falstaff! I was second messenger, I was

SHAKESPEARE No You get tired as you get older This theatre life! It's too exhausting I think it's best to give it up before you get too old If you stay on too long its only natural to get embittered, like Ben! I'm going right away from it, I think Back to the country . where I came from Like Prospero going home to Naples And yet it's hard to leave it all behind It is hard Nothing to look forward to, but just—well—to be forgotten And all the plays we've done together and thought so much about—they'll be forgotten too—and Ben says [smiling], all plays but his will be To think

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

that even the Globe itself, our own theatre, that's meant so much to us, some day won't even be a memory ! It's a strange thought how little we'll mean to those who follow us [A pause] Here are the lines for Prospero

[He holds the script, but does not need to read

" Our revels now are ended These our ~~actors~~

As I foretold you, were all spirits and

Are melted into air, into thin air

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, ⁱⁿ

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,

Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve, ~~disapp're~~

And, like this insubstantial ~~pageant~~ ^{that} faded,

Leave not a rack behind We are such stuff ^{as},

As dreams are made on, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep "

BURBAGE Good night, Will, good night [going]

GILBURNE [going out R forward with BURBAGE] Good night.

CONDELL [stopping HEMMINGS as he follows the others] No, Will It mustn't all be forgotten Ben gave me an idea to-night. Hemmings here will help me We'll gather your plays together and publish them They must be published, Will And, look here, I don't mind what Ben says, or Dick either, *The Tempest*'s the best of the lot ! It shall stand first of all [declaiming] in the great, handsome folio edition of Will Shakespeare's works !

[They go off R forward]

SHAKESPEARE [suddenly coming out of his abstraction and calling after them] Not "works," Condell—for any sake, not "works" ! Plays, just plays !

CURTAIN

THE CENTURION'S BILLET AT SWACKING BULPHEN

AN EVENING IN ROMAN BRITAIN

BY A J TALBOT

CHARACTERS

CENTURION

BALBUS, *his soldier servant*

CADWOL, *headman of Swacking
Bulphen*

HIS WIFE

CLAUDEN } *their daughters*
MORDRED }

ASTEL, *a female slave*

SCENE *A room in Cadwol's house*

TIME *An evening at dusk, A.D. 61.*

MR A. J. TALBOT is another dramatist who (like Lord Dunsany, Lady Gregory, and Mr F. Sladen-Smith) prefers the one-act form to the longer play. He has a flair for humorous fantasy and grotesquery. Some irresponsible imp at his shoulder incites him to burlesque the dignified theme, or to treat with mock-solemnity the facetious or the trivial. In "The Spartan Girl" the winner of the *Daily Mail* prize for Channel-swimming describes her achievement in blank verse, and a running commentary of a horse-race is a parody of the style of Euripides. In "Lucrezia Borgia's Little Party" a tragic legend is turned to farce.

Mr Talbot's earliest plays—he has written over thirty altogether—were done for the Arts League Travelling Theatre, and they have become popular with Repertory companies. "The Old Firm's Awakening" and "The Film Star's Golden Wedding" are characteristic examples of his particular vein of humour. In "The Centurion's Billet at Swacking Bulphen" he has found a subject which will be amusing not only to pupils who are studying Latin at school, but to all persons who are acquainted with the Latin phrases which have passed into familiar use.

THE CENTURION'S BILLET AT SWACKING BULPHEN¹

SCENE *A primitive room with bare mud walls. In the right half of back wall an opening without glass serves as a window, through which may be seen a flat landscape dominated by a small hill, now bathed in the light of a sunset. To the left of this is a heavily timbered door.*

In the right wall a log fire burns in a primitive ingle-nook fireplace. Over the fire is a cooking-pot, slung on a tripod. Below this there is a door.

In the left wall there is an opening down stage, curtained with coarse material or skins.

The furniture is scanty and of roughly finished wood. There is a small table at R.C., on which is a crude candlestick, with two nearly burnt-out candles. Against back wall is a rough chair and stool, and a similar chair and stool are at left. Against left wall is a table, which is covered with an assortment of primitive pottery vessels.

Near fire is a touch of a higher civilization. A chair of Roman workmanship and pattern stands on a low rostrum. Convenient for the sitter's feet is a square of mosaic from a Roman pavement, held in position on the rostrum by a frame of thin battens.

When the curtain rises ASTEL, a strapping, slatternly Celtic girl in her twenties, is tending the fire and stirring the pot. She rises and brings chair from back wall to table. All the time she sings a barbaric chant in a low monotone.

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W C 2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Enter from L. BALBUS, a short, thick-set, bearded Roman soldier, carrying two wooden buckets of water.

ASTEL [breaking off chant] Whoy, if it isn't Balbus ! What now, Balbus ? *Quid nunc ?*

BALBUS *Semper idem*—always same Much labour, little pay.

ASTEL. *Nil desperandum* I see you're fetching water again That's all you do, Balbus, fetch buckets of *aqua* for your centurion.

BALBUS. Yes, water. Plenty *aqua* Centurion comes soon, yes.

ASTEL It doesn't seem roight to me for fighting men to wash so much But you Roman *milites* seem wonderful set on baths.

BALBUS. Yes Centurion very clean ; plenty baths All Roman *milites* very nice, very clean

ASTEL You had ought to be clean, I reckon, the *aqua* you use

BALBUS. You—tribe of Iceni—no wash. *Nunquam*, never

ASTEL How many times have I got to tell you my tribe is Trinobante, me being taken for a slave by these thieving Iceni [gesture embracing the household] time I was a girl ? My nation's Suffolk Can't you get that into your thick head ? Me Trinobante Trinobantes *bonum*—Iceni, no *bonum* *Comprehende*, you dizzy fool, you ?

BALBUS *Non comprehendo* “dizzy fool”

ASTEL Whether you *comprehendo* or not, that's what you are.

BALBUS [giving it up and lifting pails] Centurion soon comes. *Tempus fugit* [Parthian shot] You, tribe of Trinobante, no wash ! *Nunquam*, never

ASTEL. Perhaps we Trinobantes wash more than you suspect. We don't sound the trumpet every time we have a bath. We don't go about all day crying, “*Aqua-aqua, lavo-lavo*, washy-washy.”

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

[She comes over with a heavy tread, and hustles him while he is helpless with the pails.

BALBUS Stop! [Puts pails down] You—elephanta! [Easily driving her off by splashing her] You—big elephanta

ASTEL No comprehendo. What is elephanta?

BALBUS Elephanta—animal Very big [Shows height] Nose long [Measures length with arm] Two teeth—very long [Measures them]

ASTEL You talk hully like a fool Elephanta indeed! Anyone knows there's no such animal

[Steps heard outside.]

BALBUS Centurion comes

[He goes hurriedly off R, with water ASTEL goes to fireplace.]

[Enter CENTURION, door in back wall He is a young clean-shaven man, swarthy and handsome, wearing full armour He puts his helmet on table R C.]

CENTURION Balbus!

BALBUS [off R] Adsum, O centurio.

CENTURION Venis! [BALBUS comes on at the double, and unbuckles the CENTURION'S armour] Cur arma mea non polis? [BALBUS looks shamefaced CENTURION points to spots on helmet] Decorum est centurioni galeam sordidam ferre? [BALBUS stands rebuked To ASTEL] To-night let there be sufficient candles

[Points a critical finger at candle ends

ASTEL Why do you want new candelas before it is necessarius? These will last foine to-night, and I don't hardly like to ask the mistress for new candelas, for the domina's that mean you'd think her candelas was asrum gold to hear her go on, and what's more—

CENTURION [covering his ears] Tace, puella! Enough of words, Astel To-night new candelæ in candelabrum put That is my wish, tell your domina [He goes off R]

ASTEL What did the Centurion say to you, Balbus?

BALBUS Centurion say galea very nice, very clean

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

ASTEL. No he didn't [pointing accusing finger at helmet]! He said his *galea* was dirty. And so it is. I'd think for shame if I was you. But, there, you're not much of a mucher for work, and from what I can see for polishing brass you're far too *suaviter in modo* Remember, Balbus, labour *omnia vincit*, as the saying is.

[*Two young girls appear in doorway at L* · CLAUDEN has long golden plaits and is dressed in blue, MORDRED has long black plaits and is dressed in scarlet. CLAUDEN carries a small earthenware pot, with some flowers in it

BALBUS. *Ave, puellæ!* Enter *Centurio abest.*

[*Points off R*

MORDRED [*calling off L*] Come on, Mother, the room's free.

[CLAUDEN and MORDRED come timidly right into the room. CLAUDEN puts flowers on table R.C.

ASTEL. My, what lovely flowers!

MORDRED. Get on with your work, Astel, and don't have so much to say [ASTEL takes candlestick and goes off L.

CLAUDEN [*to BALBUS, touching helmet*] *Galea?*

BALBUS. Yes *Galea* [*Teaching her names of plumed crest and breastplate*] *Crista Lorica*

CLAUDEN [*repeating words*] *Crista Lorica*. [*Puts on helmet and strikes posture*] Look Mordred, *civis Romanus sum.*

BALBUS No You—girl, *puella* Say, *civis Romana sum*

[Enter HEADMAN'S WIFE at L She has greying dark hair coiled round her head, and is dressed sombrely She carries a pair of small curtains in the Celts' favourite colour—scarlet

WIFE Clauden! Take that off at once! What are you thinking about?

[CLAUDEN replaces helmet on table Voice off R calls, "Balbus" BALBUS goes off quickly.

MORDRED Clauden's always with these Romans, learning Latin and becoming familiar.

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

WIFE You should have more pride, Clauden. To learn the language of our conquerors is *infra dignitatem*

CLAUDEN [laughing]. There! You're speaking Latin yourself

WIFE I don't lower myself by *learning* Latin I just happen to pick it up—Latin is so very catching. Now come and help me with these curtains, both of you

[The three women babble excitedly as they fix the scarlet curtains to hang one each side of the opening in back wall. The curtains have a primitive design in black, and are on a string, so that they may be easily drawn together.]

[ASTEL has entered and put candelabrum with lighted tallow candles on table—for the sunset has deepened. She now stands tense with excitement by fireplace, watching the fixing of the curtains.]

WIFE and daughters stand back to admire effect

There!

MORDRED How beautiful!

CLAUDEN It will please the Centurion

ASTEL It's lovely! What *elegantia*, as the saying is!

[Enter CADWOL, the headman, from L, a tall, well-built man, with long hair and full beard, tinged with grey]

WIFE Cadwol, look at my curtains!

CADWOL Wife, is this seemly? When we Iceni are mourning the death of our king, Prasutagus, when our good Queen Boadicea is left alone in the care of these dirty Romans, is that the time to think of curtains?

WIFE [taking chair and sitting] I wanted to show the Centurion that we know how to live in good style

[MORDRED stands by her mother, CLAUDEN is near Roman chair, CADWOL moves to and fro L]

CADWOL Four generations of my family have lived in this house—and never a curtain. Are not our honest Iceni ways good enough for this Roman?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

CLAUDEN. Mother wanted the Centurion to see you're not a *rusticus*—that we're not *plebs*.

CADWOL *Rusticus . . . plebs!* Latin! It's not enough to have to give up my best rooms to this Roman—my daughter picks up Latin! We don't want curtains to show we're not herds. Why, we've travelled, we've got an air.

WIFE. Every year we go to Colchester.

CADWOL Camulodunum, woman, Camulodunum. And as a Druid I have made the pilgrimage to Stonehenge On the way back I did Londinium. [Pauses reflectively] Ah! [Resuming] No, curtains or not, we are as good as the Romans I can't make out why they have sent this detachment of troops right out here to Swacking Bulphen. As headman I've always kept this hamlet tranquil There's been no trouble in these parts since we burnt out a village of the Trinobantes—the time I brought back Astel

MORDRED [giggling]. Was Astel all the spoils of war?

CADWOL. Yes, Astel was the loot. Ha, ha! [They all turn, laughing, to look at ASTEL depreciatingly] As for the Romans, they are like a blight on the country. They have destroyed the sacred groves of the Druids, they forbid human sacrifices And now my barns are full of loafing soldiers, and I am told to come into my own house by the back door

MORDRED No Latin for me! I like my own people

CLAUDEN So do I But the Romans interest me Look at this little square of mosaic [Points to mosaic at foot of chair on rostrum] Balbus told me it is a piece of *pavimentum* from the Centurion's *dulcis domus*

[CADWOL winces at the Latin

WIFE Clauden, why must you use that dreadful language?

CADWOL Speak your own tongue, or not at all

CLAUDEN That mosaic is from the floor of his father's

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

mansion, so that wherever the Centurion goes his feet may rest on a little piece of home

CADWOL Pity he didn't stop there !

MORDRED He comes to our country, and must have a fire in his room—in the summer Fine men, the Romans !

CLAUDEN Fine enough to conquer us.

CADWOL They only conquered us because they fight unfairly They protect themselves with armour, and fight behind fortifications That is cowardly

WIFE They call us barbarians, but have they got Druids ?

CADWOL Have they got mead ?

MORDRED Have they got bearded oysters ?

CLAUDEN They have other things

WIFE What other things ?

CLAUDEN Why—er—water-clocks

CADWOL Water-clocks ! I don't know how the Romans would get on without water [Off R *there is the sound of water being poured into a bath*] There's that young Centurion washing again Every day

[*Loud splashing off R, and the CENTURION'S voice uplifted in song*

WIFE Three times a day !

ASTEL [*butting in excitedly*] He washes all over—Balbus told me so—he washes *in puris naturabilis*

WIFE That will do, Astel

ASTEL That's what he said Those were Balbus's very own *ipsissima verba*

CADWOL Astel, I won't have Latin from *you*. Get out ! [ASTEL *scurries off L*] There is nothing new in the idea of bathing [CENTURION's song, *amidst splashing of water, swells up again*] We have baths too. It is part of our religion Every good Druid amongst the Iceni has a bath on May Day, when the sun enters Taurus. But there is a great difference between bathing as a

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

religious observance and making a foolish habit of it, like these Romans.

MORDRED We have nothing to learn from the Romans.

CLAUDEN. They have books . . . writings . . . poetry.

CADWOL And have we no poetry, no Druid hymns ?
[*intones*].

“ The heat of the sun shall be wasted,
Yet shall the Britons have an inclosure of great renown ”

[ASTEL *creeps in and stands just inside door L.*

ALL “ And the heights of Snowdon shall receive
inhabitants ”

CADWOL “ Then will come a spotted cow and procure
a blessing.”

ALL “ On the Serene Day she will bellow.
On the Eve of May shall she be boiled ”

CADWOL Can the Romans equal that ?

CLAUDEN Of course not ! But some of their things
are better. Their buildings Why, the Capitoleum at
Rome is three hundred paces long, and the roof is sup-
ported on many marble pillars, each thrice the girth of
an oak-tree and twice as high [Sceptical pause.]

WIFE Who told you all this ?

CLAUDEN. The Centurion

ASTEL [butting in excitedly] And Balbus told me about
the *elephanta*,

CADWOL What on earth is an *elephanta* ?

ASTEL An *elephanta* is an animal twice as high as a horse,
with two teeth a yard long and a nose two yards long

WIFE Nonsense ! The girl can't be *compos mentis*

MORDRED [giggling] Latin, Mother, Latin !

CLAUDEN Mother's as bad as I am

WIFE What I meant to say was that Astel can't be . . .
she isn't—— [MORDRED and CLAUDEN *giggle afresh*] I
wish you girls wouldn't moither me I meant to say
she's . . . she's—— [Solving her difficulty by shouting at
ASTEL] Astel, leave the room ! [ASTEL *runs off L.*

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

CADWOL There, Clauden, that will teach you not to be so simple as to believe everything these Romans tell you Obviously there's no such animal as an *elephanta*, and just as there's no *elephanta*, so there is no Capitoleum

CLAUDEN [mildly]. *Quod erat demonstrandum*

WIFE Latin again! I think you had better leave the room too, Clauden

CADWOL Let her stay and hear a word of warning. Let Clauden be worthy of us as good Iceni Let her remember that her father is an Elder of the Druids, soon to be a Bard And that sooner or later we mean to cast off the Roman yoke

WIFE S-sh! Not so loud, Cadwol!

CADWOL [softening his voice] All I say is, watch Beacon Hill [He points to hill seen through window] That is where the beacon has always burned to call us to fight for our liberty Its light called my father's father out to stem the first coming of the Romans under Julius Cæsar himself Its light called me out to resist the second coming of the Romans under Claudius Its light again to throw off the rule of that dirty Roman governor Ostorius Scapula We didn't succeed, because we failed to act together But next time there will be no mistake Next time that beacon burns the whole country will be rising like one man It is all arranged So, remember, next time—

MORDRED Next time

CADWOL Now leave me [Glaring at door R] If I may call my own room my own for a little while I want to learn by rote some Druid ritual Let me know if my herdsman returns from the market

[WIFE and daughters go out L

“Clad in white, with a chaplet of oak-leaves on the brow,
In the face of the moon, and in the eye of the Light,
Then shall the plant be cut, the sacred mistletoe.
Then shall the plant be cut, with a golden sickle

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Shaped like the moon when it is six nights old
Then shall the—" [BALBUS enters unceremoniously R
BALBUS [breezily]. *Senex*—old man—*permittē*. *Centurio*
—supper [Calls L loudly] Astel, supper!

CADWOL. To think that I, headman of Swacking
Bulphen, should be treated so: not allowed to use my
own front door, turned out of my best room by Roman
barbarians.

BALBUS [clearing table of armour] Barbarians, no, old
man. Iceni barbarians, Romans good

CADWOL. Don't call me 'old man' I'm as good as
six Romans, without their armour.

BALBUS. You Iceni—*vulgares* No wash, *nunquam*

CADWOL Oh, if I could talk Latin I would tell you
something! [Calling through door L] Clauden, Clauden!
[Her voice is heard replying] What is the Latin for pig?
Eh? Oh, any kind of pig will do! [Her voice is heard]
Porcus? [He turns on BALBUS] There, that's what you
are—*porcus*. Roman *porcus*!

—BALBUS [running good-humouredly] Roman *porcus* good,
old man Plenty fight Finish Gallia, finish Belgica,
finish Germania. Soon—finish all Britannia

CADWOL [spluttering]. Oh, I'd like to . . . I wish I
could . . . [Loudly and slowly] Romans no *bonum*!
[This fails to annoy BALBUS] If only I knew Latin better!
[Tries again] Nero no *bonum* [This also is without effect]
Anyhow, I will use my own front door [At door fresh
inspiration] And, what's more, Julius Cæsar was no
bonum.

[This making no impression at all on BALBUS, CAD-
WOL goes out into the night, slamming the door.

BALBUS [laughing] Exit Cadwol

[Enter ASTEL L, with crude crocks, which she sets
out on table

ASTEL. Aren't the curtains beautiful, Balbus? [He
does not understand, pointing] Curtains, curtains

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

BALBUS Curtains—*vela* [*Without enthusiasm*] Very nice
[Ingratiatingly] Astel, *ancilla pulchra*, beautiful servant

ASTEL Whoy, what's come over you, Balbus? Just now I was *elephanta*, now I'm *pulchra* You want something, I shouldn't wonder

BALBUS Yes Mead Give mead, Astel

ASTEL I thought so You ask me for mead *ad nauseam*. You know it's risky, you know they measure every drop You know the *domina* doesn't make mead *pro bono publico*

BALBUS You do it before *Facile est*—easy [Mimes stealthy action] Be *circumspecta*.

ASTEL I know how to get mead There's no need for you to show me the *modus operandi* I've done it often enough, and *experientia docet*, as the *dictum* is

BALBUS You go, Astel *pulcherrima*?

ASTEL [giving in] I'll try Do you get a mug while I'm gone

[ASTEL, having first peeped cautiously through doorway L, slips out BALBUS gets himself a red earthenware handle-less mug from table up L, and comes to C Re-enter ASTEL with an earthenware jar I've got it, Balbus [Pouring out mead] But I doubt you don't know the risk I'm running

BALBUS [drinking] Astel *pulchra*, *te saluto*

[Sits on chair by table

ASTEL That's all very well Supposing the *domina* misses her precious mead, supposing one of the young *dominas* catches me *in flagrante delicto*!

BALBUS You say—for Balbus Mead for Balbus Good man, very nice Roman

ASTEL Sing your own praises, blow your own *tuba* It won't hurt *you* if I get a flogging

BALBUS Flogging for you, mead for me, good it is

ASTEL You wouldn't say that if it was *vice versa* Ah, well, so long as you enjoy yourself roight tidily.

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

BALBUS [holding out mug]. *Aliud da, et idem.* Same again
ASTEL No, no.

BALBUS Astel, Astel *pulcherrima, bis dat quæ cito dat*
Twice she gives who soon she gives *Comprehende?*

ASTEL. I *comprehende* the part about giving twice
[She slowly pours a little mead into his mug]

BALBUS. More. [Gestures to heighten the level of mead
in mug] *Excelsior, excelsior!*

ASTEL No, Balbus

[He seizes her wrist, and forces her to fill mug]

BALBUS Again, Astel, te saluto. [Noise off R]

ASTEL Cave Centurion

BALBUS [drinking up quickly] *Nunc est bibendum.*

[BALBUS put chair in its place above table ASTEL

creeps hurriedly off L Enter CENTURION R

He carries a tablet and a book He goes to warm
himself at the fire. BALBUS, clapping his hands

Astel, supper!

[CENTURION seats himself above table Enter

ASTEL L, with a plate, upon which she puts a
portion from the pot by the fire BALBUS goes
off R, and reappears at once with an amphora
of wine and a drinking-horn for the CENTURION
Throughout the meal BALBUS acts as butler.

CENTURION What is that, Astel?

ASTEL Boiled columba, very good

[Puts plate before him.

CENTURION Columba—dove

ASTEL No, pigeon [CENTURION notes this on tablet

CENTURION Columba—pigeon These flowers, what
you call them?

ASTEL. Love-lies-bleeding

CENTURION [making a note] *Amarantus caudatus*—love-
lies-bleeding Love—amor. [Sudden thought] Astel, who
these flowers here put?

ASTEL. One of the young *dominas*

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

CENTURION Dark-haired young *domina*, or——

ASTEL No, not Mordred Not that lummocking girl!

CENTURION What is “lummocking”?

ASTEL It's . . . it's . . . You wouldn't *comprehende*,
Centurion It was Clauden put the flowers

CENTURION Ah, Clauden *Auricomus*—golden-haired
one! Astel, mistress and daughters here to come, I
invite Go! [ASTEL flies off L To BALBUS] Lum-
mocking, *quid significat lummocking?*

BALBUS Lummocking . . . lummocking . . . O *cen-*
turio, sine dubitatione verbum barbarum

[WIFE comes in L, in the rôle of a matron, with a
treasured daughter under each wing

CENTURION Ave! Be seated When *solus* I am un-
happy Be willing to share my *solitudinem*

WIFE I am honoured, Centurion [She sits in chair L,
with CLAUDEN and MORDRED on low stools R and L close
beside her] I hope you are comfortable in my poor
domicilium

CENTURION I give thanks

WIFE I hope you keep well

CENTURION Yes But in my joints much pain always
I suffer

WIFE It is this cold, damp summer I must give you
a family simple It is never known to fail. Mordred,
pass me that little jar [MORDRED passes a rough pot from
side-table] Take this powder, Centurion, night and
morning—enough to cover a small coin

CLAUDEN [taking pot to CENTURION] Enough to cover
a *denarius* [Lingering] Oh, a book! A real book!

CENTURION Yes Julius Cæsar wrote it

CLAUDEN [daring to touch it] Writing! What does
that say [pointing to a line]?

CENTURION *Gallia in tres partes divisa est* You com-
prehend?

CLAUDEN Gaul is divided into three parts

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

WIFE Claden, come and sit down. You mustn't worry the Centurion.

[CLAUDEN unwillingly resumes her seat. Enter ASTEL L., excitedly bringing a plate of oysters to the CENTURION.

ASTEL. Oysters, bearded oysters!

CENTURION *Ostrei!* Good to be eaten

ASTEL. Yes *Ostrei* with *barba* very *bonum* for Roman Centurion

CENTURION Astel, good cook you are Time will come, Balbus from the army having been discharged, on his farm wife he will require

ASTEL [pleased, with a guffaw] Whoy, Balbus ain't never a farmer, surely? Balbus couldn't draw a straight furrow, I doubt And what woman would want such a little runt of a man?

[She takes the dirty plate of first course, and dashes off L with a whoop of laughter.

CENTURION [puzzled, taking up tablet] "Little runt of a man" Little, *parvus*, of a man, *hominis*, runt .. runt ... What is runt?

WIFE. Astel is very ignorant, Centurion,

MORDRED She's a Trinobante Just cattle!

CENTURION. Always speech of Astel difficult to be understood it is

CLAUDEN She merely meant a little man—*homunculus*

CENTURION [making a note] Little runt of a man—*homunculus*. *Circuitus verborum*.

MORDRED [aside] Mother, why doesn't he notice our curtains?

WIFE [aside] Patience, child, he's a man

BALBUS [pouring wine, aside] *Vela admirari utile est.*

Vela, curtains.

CENTURION [after stealthy look] Ah! Those curtains I admire. I give thanks

WIFE We are, of course, accustomed to curtains

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

But I thought that you, a soldier, might think them
womanly

CENTURION. Elegant they are In Rome I imagine
myself [Rises] Let us have *symposium* You com-
prehend *symposium*? Wine, talk, song Balbus, *vinum da*
[BALBUS serves wine to the women from the amphora,

MORDRED having fetched earthenware mugs from
side-table L CENTURION sits on Roman chair
on rostrum He raises his drinking-horn and
drinks to the women, and they sip coyly from their
mugs ASTEL has returned, and stands unobtrus-
sively just inside door L, a delighted spectator

To you, good health, to country of Iceni, prosperity
Be unwilling only as conquerors Romans to regard
With gifts of law, order, peace, and justice to small
nations we come

WIFE [guardedly] You have much that we admire

CENTURION First guidance, then alliance, not only by
treaty, but by blood, for where soldiers are stationed
there, their service ended, they are discharged, and
where they are discharged they marry [His eye resting
on CLAUDEN] Beautiful girls, to marry Roman Con-
querors, often are not afraid

WIFE Very often that is so

CENTURION All this Iceni comprehend, and trust us
For your King himself, Prasutagus, being about to die,
to Roman guardianship Queen Boadicea entrusted

MORDRED That is true A traveller from Camulo-
dunum told us that yesterday

CENTURION Guardianship will be arranged when the
legatus, Suetonius Paulinus, returns He is in Wales

WIFE They are bad people in Wales

CLAUDEN But I hear they are worse in Caledonia

MORDRED Yes, they say the Scots are very wild

CENTURION Suetonius Paulinus faithful trustee to
Queen Boadicea will be

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

WIFE I saw Queen Boadicea once.

MORDRED } And I

CLAUDEN. } We all saw her.

WIFE She had bright yellow hair reaching down to her girdle, a great gold collar, and a tunic of many colours. Her mantle floated in the breeze as she rode in her chariot Ah, Queen Boadicea !

CENTURION [getting tablet ready] Boadicea—what means that name ?

CLAUDEN In Latin, Centurion, Boadicea means *victoria*

WIFE. Queen Boadicea, Queen Victoria ! She had an eight-foot spear in her right hand and a sheaf of javelins in her left. The dear Queen ! Bronze scythe-blades were on the hubs of her wheels, and her chariot was drawn by three horses

CLAUDEN. The shaft-horse was a skewbald, and the two wheelers blue roans

MORDRED [with a superior laugh] Blue roans, Clauden ? They were strawberry roans

CLAUDEN They were blue roans

MORDRED Strawberry roans

CLAUDEN. Blue roans

WIFE [sharply] Whatever are you thinking of, Clauden ? Of course they were strawberry roans ! They were strawberry roans, Centurion

[The CENTURION smiles politely, and lays his tablet aside in despair

MORDRED [going into a fit of giggles] Fancy mistaking strawberry roans for blue roans !

CENTURION [to ease situation] Wine, talk, we have had Now song let us have

WIFE. Yes Clauden, sing us a song

CLAUDEN [protesting unconvincingly] Oh, Mother, I couldn't ! I don't know anything

WIFE. Yes, you do. Sing, "On the bay with the silver points"

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

CLAUDEN [*singing*]

“ Bardicco is mounted and rides to the war ”

ALL WOMEN [*clapping hands and beating out a rhythm*].

“ On the bay with the silver points ”

CLAUDEN “ Thirsty and keen is the sword at his hip ”

ALL WOMEN “ On the bay with the silver points ”

CLAUDEN. “ Ten arrows he carries for ten of the foe ”

ALL WOMEN “ On the bay with the silver points ”

CLAUDEN “ The mountains he crosses , the rivers he swims ”

ALL WOMEN “ On the bay with the silver points ”

[*The singing is stopped by abrupt entry of CADWOL at door back He looks sullen*

CENTURION *Ave, Cadwol, headman*

CADWOL *Ave, Centurion*

CENTURION Why at that door without permission you enter ?

CADWOL Centurion, I heard the singing and hurried in, for it is not right to sing festive songs at this time The Iceni nation are mourning the death of their king

CENTURION Another door there is. It is not allowed at that door to enter

CADWOL I was in a hurry, Centurion The singing shocks our people, especially from this house, the house of their headman

CENTURION Enough To-night, although song is unbecoming, yet wine and talk permissible are Balbus, *vinum da*

[*BALBUS serves CADWOL, who remains standing He goes to replenish glasses of WIFE and daughters*

WIFE No No well, just a little Mordred, Clauden, no more [*All drink respectfully to CENTURION*

CADWOL Centurion, there are bad rumours in the village

CENTURION What rumours ?

CADWOL My herdsman has returned from the market

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

at Hatching Tye, and a man came in there who said that he had been told in Hatching Tawney by a man who came from farther east that there have been evil doings in Camulodunum.

CENTURION [*amused*]. What evil doings in Colchester?

CADWOL. They say that in Camulodunum the Romans seized and bound Queen Boadicea—

WIFE. Oh!

CADWOL. Flogged her, and then looted her palace and stole her treasure.

CLAUDEN [*reproachfully*]. Oh, Centurion, is this what you told me—*civilitas successit barbarum*?

CADWOL. What does that mean?

CLAUDEN. Civilization replaces barbarism.

[CADWOL's family all begin talking at once.]

CENTURION [*knocking for silence*] Let us be calm. Man tells man that another man has said that this and that he has been told. Therefore we believe? No. Not thus truth comes.

[*Through the dark opening in back wall suddenly a beacon can be seen to flare up. In the room they are all unaware of this.*]

Be assured that in Colchester all is well. I speak to you as one whose news direct and quickly comes, not through lying mouth to lying mouth. All is well. Suetonius Paulinus is in Wales, but while absent none to harm Queen Boadicea will dare.

CADWOL. The people believe the rumour.

[*CLAUDEN rises to put mugs on side-table*]

CENTURION. Cadwol, headman, tranquil to keep them your duty is. Even if this rumour be true [*smiling at possibility*] patience let them have. Let them await return of Suetonius Paulinus.

[*CLAUDEN, moving along back wall, notices the beacon*]

She stands irresolute, then draws curtains quietly

If wrong has been done swift to avenge he will be. But

THE CENTURION'S BILLET

if people rise up then Suetonius Paulinus will punish, and those who your Queen have maltreated, being forgotten during revolt, too late justice will receive

CADWOL I will tell them

CENTURION It is well But, be assured, no outrage has occurred [CLAUDEN, with intention, yawns noisily.] Tired, auricoma? Late it is. [He rises with a gesture of dismissal] Until to-morrow.

[ASTEL slips out L, CADWOL and his family follow ceremoniously, with CLAUDEN in rear At door, unobserved, she turns and comes to CENTURION.

CLAUDEN Oh, Centurion, it is true!

CENTURION [smiling] And you too believe it, auricoma?

[CLAUDEN runs to window and draws back curtains.

CLAUDEN Look! Now you must believe

CENTURION That is nothing Druids perhaps. Religious sacrifices

CLAUDEN. No, no, it is a beacon A war beacon Look, there is another and another A chain of beacons!

[CENTURION looks left and right through the opening, and gives a low whistle of surprise

CENTURION Balbus, centuria paret

[BALBUS opens door, back, and blows softly three short blasts and one long on a whistle. It is answered by two short blasts, and sound of activity (off) follows BALBUS then closes door, crosses stage, and goes swiftly off R

It is true, it is true Beacons, many beacons Whole people in revolt [He goes to his armour and rapidly puts it on] Clauden—auricoma—now Romans you hate?

CLAUDEN Our Queen! Can such treachery be forgiven?

CENTURION No Fools, fools, fools! No words I have Now your hatred we merit But why warn me? Why tell me that beacon burns? [She does not answer] Why, auricoma?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

CLAUDEN. Perhaps . . . perhaps there is just one Roman I would not wish to be murdered in his bed

CENTURION. Grateful I am, *auricoma* Remember—

CLAUDEN. Oh, hurry, hurry, Centurion While there is yet a chance, slip away towards Londinium.

CENTURION. No. Towards Colchester I go.

CLAUDEN. But don't you understand, it is death? The whole population between is in arms. It is death that way

CENTURION. Also it is duty that way

[BALBUS comes in R., fully armoured. He rapidly puts book and tablets in a small leather sack, then the pieces forming mosaic square on the rostrum As he comes to where CLAUDEN is standing three or four pieces of mosaic fall from the sack Picking them up hastily, one escapes his notice.

BALBUS O Clauden, *vale dico*. Tell Astel, soon return Astel give mead Plenty mead. [He goes, door at back

CENTURION [musingly]. Clauden . . . that golden hair in Rome . . . what envy . . . what despair! [Putting on helmet] *Eheu! Jacta est alea.*

CLAUDEN Yes, the die is cast

CENTURION [at door, with a smile] *Ave atque vale, auricoma Moriturus te saluto* [He goes

[She goes impulsively to window and looks after him

WIFE'S VOICE [off L] Clauden! Clauden!

CLAUDEN I'm coming

[She comes down stage, pausing at C with her eyes on the CENTURION's chair Observing the coloured square of mosaic on the floor, she picks it up and handles it caressingly Then, putting it in the bosom of her dress, she goes slowly off L.

CURTAIN

NOTES AND EXERCISES

NOTE.—Plays may be roughly divided into three classes (i) those founded upon an artificial story or theatrical situation, (ii) those founded upon a natural story which is largely shaped by the understanding of human character, (iii) those founded upon an idea or a thesis. Farce and melodrama belong to the first group, great comedy and tragedy to the second, and didactic plays (including a number of fantasies, allegories, domestic or sociological dramas, and problem plays) to the third. The groups tend to overlap or to fuse, so that a rigid classification is often impossible.

10. WOMEN AT WAR

1 Describe the subject of the play in fewer than fifty words. Would you say that it originated from a situation a character-study, or from an idea which the author wished to dramatize? — *what is the inspiration to write the play*

2 Mention the titles of any historical novels dealing with this period

3 Do you consider that the playwright has been fair to both parties?

4 Give a brief account of each character in turn, and indicate the two who are most outstanding

5 The coming of news of a great battle is naturally dramatic. Can you give other examples from poems, novels, or other plays?

6 Although no men appear in the play (since they are away from home) the play would be meaningless without the 'invisible background' of men and battlefields. Do you agree that in a war play for men only (like "Journey's End") there is an equal degree of consciousness of the feminine background?

7 Would it be right to regard "Women at War" as an anti-war play? — *is it an anti-war play*

8 Discuss the dramatic value of the final incident

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

THE DYE-HARD

1. Would you say that Mr Brighouse began with an idea, a situation, or a study of character? Or are the 'motives' interfused?
2. Explain the struggle which takes place within Tom's mind, and also how the various characters contribute to make it more intense
3. Consider how the playwright prepared the audience for Tom's ultimate decision. Give examples
4. What is the symbolical significance of cricket in this play?
5. Write an imaginary dialogue between Susan and Mrs Butterworth on the occasion of their next meeting
6. Describe your impressions of the Lancashire dialect. How would a sentence like "Think on those trousers are done by I come down" be expressed in (a) King's English, (b) any other dialect which you happen to know?
7. Write a short essay on one of the following subjects:
 - (a) Loyalty
 - (b) The Influence of Machinery.
 - (c) Die-hards

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

1. At which moment in the play did you suspect the truth about Augustus? Would the play have been more satisfying (a) if the father had recognized his son's face, (b) if the father had overheard the final word?
2. What is meant by saying that the watchman and policeman are real characters, not merely conventional figures?
3. Compare the watchman with the familiar character in the short stories of W W Jacobs
4. Make an attempt at analysing the character of Augustus's father, with special reference to his ideas concerning right and wrong (Is he consistent, for example? Is his mind an organized unity or simply a patchwork?)

NOTES AND EXERCISES

5. Read "The Return of the Prodigal," by St John Hankin, and compare Eustace with Augustus.

6. Bearing in mind the proverbial saying "Like father, like son," how might it be possible to account for the failure of Augustus? Make four or five suggestions

7. What are the essential differences between a play and a fragment of life?

8. How would you classify this play?

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

1. Make a list of the accusations which the two men bring against each other (Not more than twelve each)

2. Study the dialect used in the play, and describe its main characteristics

3. Compare the theme of the play with that of "Friends," by Herbert Farjeon (included in the third series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*)

4. What is meant by 'unconscious humour'? Can you quote any examples of (a) wit, (b) conscious humour, from "The Workhouse Ward"?

5. Explain the meaning of 'banshee'

6. Discuss the 'psychology' of the play, and say whether you consider the temperaments of the two protagonists to be peculiarly Irish.

7. Compare the play with "Acid-drops," by Gertrude Jennings

MR SAMPSON

1. Mention three plays in which a man is compelled to choose between two women, and three others in which a woman has to choose between two men

2. Do you consider that Mr Sampson's dilemma is made to appear credible? Give your opinion on the tossing of the coin and its unusual result.

3. Compare the West Country dialect with the Irish dialect

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

or Lady Gregory and with the Lancashire dialect used by Mr Brighouse

4 Discuss the ending of the play. Would any other 'solution' have been satisfactory? ✓

5 Compare Caroline's speech to the clock with the girl's soliloquy at the opening of "Waterloo," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (included in the second series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*), and say which is the more convincing. Could the necessary information have been conveyed to the audience in a more plausible manner?

6 Describe the chief differences between the characters of Caroline and Catherine Stevens

7 *active*
bold
relative
(2) framed
curved

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

1. What adjectives would you employ to describe the melody which gives the title to this play?

2 Explain what evidences appear in the play that the action took place (a) in America, (b) in the early nineteenth century

3 Compare the pedlar's speech with that of Hiram

4 Do you agree with the girl's decision? If so, do you recall what happened to Prunella? (If this alarms you try to imagine married life with Hiram!)

5 Why is danger so alluring and security so rarely attractive? (Subject for discussion)

6 Write a poem or a passage of poetic-prose in praise of the violin

"resort"
"relief"
"laid on smoothly"

THE POISON PARTY

1 What is the difference between a burlesque and a farce? Give the names of any serious plays which have recently been burlesqued in the production

2 Which part of the play may be described as 'exposition'? Make a list of the moments of crisis that follow, and criticize the construction

NOTES AND EXERCISES

3 Compare "The Poison Party" with "Lucrezia Borgia's Little Party," by A. J. Talbot (see *The Best One-Act Plays of 1933*)

4 Write an imaginary conversation which might have taken place after the play between (a) the Queen-mother and the Cardinal or (b) Denise and her father

5 Tell the story of any other one-act play by Mr Sladen-Smith, and discuss his sense of humour

6 Suggest other possible subjects for burlesque.

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE

NOTE.—The original story in Rabelais is extremely short—little more than a page—and relates the bare incidents. Mr Ashley Dukes had the task of elaborating the characters and creating most of the dialogue. The ending, however, is different. The original runs thus

"Some time after, the Doctor asked for his Fee of the Husband, who answered, That truly he was deaf, and so was not able to understand what the tenure of his Demand might be. Whereupon the Leech bedusted him with a little, I know not what, sort of Powder, which rendered him a Fool immediately so great was the stultificating Vertue of that strange kind of pulverised Dose. Then did this Fool of a Husband, and his mad Wife, joyn together, falling on the Doctor and the Surgeon, did so scratch, bethwack, and bang them, that they were left half dead upon the place, so furious were the Blows which they received. I never in my Life-time laughed so much as at the acting of that Buffoonery."

1 What do you know about Rabelais?

2 Mention any other plays or stories in which the alleged loquacity of a woman provides the popular humour

3 The creating of the wife's torrential speech was the work of Mr Dukes. Do you consider that he chose the right subjects? Can you suggest any other subjects which would have been equally effective?

4 The play is exceptionally long for a single act. Can you discover any speeches which could be cut without serious loss? Are there any unnecessary characters?

5 Explain why the final 'twist' in the plot is important. Why does it remind one of "Rory Aforesaid," by John Brandane (see the third series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*)?

ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Do you think the incident quoted above would have made a better 'curtain'? Give reasons for your answer

6. What are the special requirements in a play intended for broadcasting? Why is "The Dumb Wife of Cheap-side" more suitable than "Women at War"? Which other plays in this collection might be broadcast with little change?

✓

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

1. Give a short account of the Elizabethan theatre¹

2. State what you know about the rival companies of Burbage and Alcyn. If Shakespeare had written plays for the latter in which ways would they probably have differed from the plays we know?

3. Mention eight Elizabethan dramatists, and give the names of any two plays by each

4. Say what you think of Ben Jonson's criticisms of Shakespeare. Explain what he meant by the "unities," and (if possible) say something about the influence of dramatic theories upon the playwrights of France and England

5. Explain the reference to the marriage of Princess Elizabeth

6. What do you think of Burbage's opinion of "The Tempest"?

7. Read "The Tempest," and indicate which scenes Mr Walker has used for "The Great Globe Itself"

8. Read "The Rehearsal," by Maurice Baring, and "Will Shakespeare," by Clemence Dane.

¹ "What would strike a modern eye most about Shakespeare's theatre was its smallness. The auditorium of the Globe was probably about 55 feet square—that is, approximately the size of a lawn-tennis court—and this included the stage, which jutted right out among the audience, and was some 43 feet wide by about 27 feet long. The play was therefore performed almost in the middle of the theatre, the groundlings standing on three sides of the stage, which was raised three or four feet off the floor, while the seats for those who could afford them were ranged in three tiers of galleries round the walls"—*The Essential Shakespeare*, by J. Dover Wilson, Chapter II.

NOTES AND EXERCISES

THE CENTURION'S BILLET AT SWACKING BULPHEN

- 1 How would you classify this play?
- 2 Make a list of a dozen other well-known Latin phrases which might have been used in the play
- 3 Have you any criticisms to make of (a) the accuracy of historical detail, (b) the structure of the play as a whole?
- 4 Discuss the setting and costumes from a producer's point of view
- 5 According to French critics, the humour of the theatre may be divided into three classes—viz ; *le mot d'esprit*, *le mot de situation*, *le mot de caractère* To which class does Mr Talbot's humour belong in this play? Give examples of other forms from the preceding plays in the collection
- 6 Say what you think about the ending of the play, and explain the reference to Queen Boadicea and her revolt against the Romans